Yuuei Survival Guide

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/35515399.

Rating:

Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Fandom:

僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationship:

Midoriya Izuku & Shirakumo Oboro, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Shirakumo Oboro & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Class 1-A, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Midoriya Izuku & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Class 1-A & Midoriya Izuku, Bakugou Katsuki & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Shinsou Hitoshi, Eri & Midoriya Izuku

Character:

Midoriya Izuku, Shirakumo Oboro, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Bakugou Katsuki, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Shinsou Hitoshi, Eri (My Hero Academia)

Additional Tags:

Ghost Shirakumo Oboro, Shirakumo Oboro is a Little Shit, Shirakumo Oboro is a Ray of Sunshine, Midoriya Izuku is a Ray of Sunshine, Cute Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku Needs A Hug, Anxious Midoriya Izuku, Shirakumo Oboro is a Good Friend, Midoriya Izuku & Shirakumo Oboro Friendship, Midoriya Izuku Sees Ghosts, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead is So Done, Protective Shirakumo Oboro, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead is a Good Teacher, Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Established Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic is a Good Teacher, Neglectful Midoriya Inko, Dadzawa, Protective Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Parental Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Child Abandonment, Abandoned Midoriya Izuku, Deaf Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Dadmic, Slow Build, Panic Attacks, Anxiety, Soft

Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Soft Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia Anime Spoilers, Shirakumo Oboro is a Menace

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of A Boy and his Ghost

Collections:
BNHA Rereadables 📖, standing ovation: fics to keep re-reading <3, FreakingAmazingFics, ✧Wan Shi Tong's Library✧, unofficial compliation of bnha spirit au and related fics, Days' best bnha finds 🌤, soul healing comes from fanfiction, ✧Chris's Best Izuku Fics✧, Most favorite works (GoSleep_NoThatSoInteresting), 👌 good shit, BEST BOI IZUKU_top BNHA works, Izuku has a haunted quirk I guess, Izuku and his Collection of Dads, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, Fics I Never Knew I Needed, Absolute Vibes to sink into, Multi-chapter BNHA fics, good ol' fashioned fluff (and some crack and whump) for the BNHA soul, Bug's Fav MHA Fics, Izuku's Dads, BNHA Treasure Box, My morning bnha tea, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, Izuku Sees dead people/spirits, ˚ʚ(´◡`)ɞ˚ kat, Worth It BNHA Fanfics Reading List - Ongoing, why I only sleep an hour a night, Maximilian's Hero Academia, Kori's fic collection, BNHA TikTok Recs That Were Actually Good, Idfk, My Hero Academia Fics To Cleanse Your Soul ♨, ✏🎤 Erasermic fics that get me through liking a niche pairing ✏🎤, vespertine, my heart is here, Myra_Approved_Version_of_Midoriya_Izuku, The Essence of Perfection, Present Mic is the best and I'm gonna YELL about it, Long fics to binge at 1 AM when you can't sleep and desperately need something occupying your mind so you don't enter a depressive spiral, From the Vault, Quality Fics, Why Am I Sleep Deprived?, ☆My Hero Stories Worth Your Time☆, hello there mister magpie, Elite_Izuku_Centric_Fic_Recs, mha fics that are my will to live, Genmhasmfffffff, 10/10 would re-read bnha, isabella9792_readinglist, The Good Stuff n All That Jazz, Honestly every fanfic of Izuku I have ever read., DadZawa and PapaMic!, Dadzawa Vibes, My Fav BNHA WIP Works, fics better than a lot of published novels, Best Adoption Fics, Death Power AUs, Personal_Preferences, ibisfavs, 🍀GOAT FICS feat: My Hero Izuku 🍀, ☆ Little Red's BNHA Library ☆, Favorite Fics That I Hoard, 📚 Wyrm's Fic Hoard 🐉, Todo lo que puedo llegar a OLVIDAR, Keep up with these gems, Izuku is just trying his best your honor, MHA dadzawa or dadmic and their zero-regrets family , STO My Hero

Academia - not completed works, Stalker’s Amongst Stalker’s, Read_again_6, Dadzawa protects the Green Bean!💙, quetegustandebnh, Izuku Midoriya Related Fics, Froglets_favourite_mha_fics, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Best of Hurt/Comfort, bnha faves that keep me going, Bnha fanfic who has my heart, My Hero Academia, BB42_Favorite_MHA_fics, passes MY vibe check!, Surprise! It’s Trauma!, Eatbook's Cherished and wanting more All Fandoms, Top Tier Reads To Munch On, Things to fuel my escapism., I live for Deku (and Class 1-A), My daddy issues and Dadzawa, Boku no Hero Academia Fanfics, BNHA - My favorite fanfics, The 1412's Library of Good Reads, (mostly) just some funky lil Izu fics, Niks, dadzawa and his hellions, ghosts! but not ghosts 'aah!!' ghosts 'plot?', fics i cant stop thinking about, 👟 precious cloudboy, Best fluff and Angst, Opossum's Trash List, Bnha bests, broccoli_shit, Bnha Stories, craftyreader_favs, blasphemi’s bnha fics, Dreamon's Fics Recs For You Lazy Ass Shit, just some incredible bnha ff, Quality Gen Fics, Better than Canon BNHA, Nohn's Favorites, T.S.S (This shit slaps), I’ll come back, BNHA Top Tier, My Hero Academia fics that caused my insomnia (in a good way), Books but I'm Picky, Really good ongoing MHA fanfiction, MГА, 🎠Sleepy’s Best Recs🏇, I need a good parental figure [read: Dadzawa] in my life, AnoditeOmniaAbuzz, My daily dose of serotonin, Want to read, MyHeroAcademia1414, I will read you eventually (￣へ￣;), All kinds: BNHA's Fics version, LiarJester_favorites_MHA, 💙 Favorite BNHA Works ⚡, Fanfics That Make Me Wanna Stay Up 'Til 3AM, Mha fics That are Geva approved & recommended, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, The best/amazing, AriaAjin's Top Favorites, Ongoing Works (Recently Updated), Sappy's favorite works, Literally love these sm, the best bnha fanfics on this whole website, Gryffs fics II, Lee_ec Fave Unfinished, MY HERO ACADEMIA (but like... also villains), things i would like to read, 💙Dadzawa and other💙

Stats:

Published: 2021-12-05 Completed: 2023-10-26 Words: 519,280 Chapters: 50/50

Yuuei Survival Guide

by LowlyWriter

Summary

Izuku steps towards the other teen, holding his hand out to shake, “I’m Midoriya Izuku by the way. We haven’t officially met yet, right? I don’t remember seeing you at the Entrance Exam?”

The blue-haired boy pauses, studies his hand uncertainly before shrugging. “Shirakumo Oboro,” he introduces in return, hand *phasing* right through Izuku’s when he goes to return the handshake. Shirakumo doesn’t seem surprised by it, but Izuku whips his hand back when the intense chill climbs up his arm.

or,

Izuku tries to pretend eveything is *okay* even though his homelife is crumbling around him, there's an insanely powerful Quirk that's not *entirely* his coursing through his veins, he suddenly knows his childhood hero, *All Might*, and to top it all off, he seems to have befriend a pastel blue-haired ghost that has way too much insider knowledge on Izuku's new homeroom teacher, and English teacher. He's really just trying to survive Yuuei...

* This fic is now a podfic! Check out the playlist by Hurricanekat98 here!

Notes

Hi hi!

So, I've recently finished the My Hero Academia anime and that same evening I lied awake in bed for hours envisioning this fic. I thought this concept was so cool, so Imma write it out! I love Shirakumo, even if there's so little about him out there, so sorry if he's OOC! There'll also probably end up being dadzawa because I'm a sucker for that and I have no self control!

Anyways! Please enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Izuku got his official Yuuei acceptance letter, it was like his whole world shifted. He felt like his life—everything he'd known—his whole world even, had been tugged out from under him, like a rug he'd been standing on pulled straight out from under his feet.

In a *good* way, of course.

The best way, because he did it. He finally did. He'd been dreaming of attending Yuuei High School from the moment he could really talk—from that first time he'd seen All Might on the news, grinning widely as he carted injured and unconscious civilians out of a collapsed building.

His dreams had never seemed achievable. One by one he'd had to pluck out what few dreams he had when they didn't seem viable, or when people told him he'd never be able to do them as a Quirkless child. But the one he could never seem to shake, the one he held the closest, was becoming a hero like All Might.

And to do that, he wanted to be the best he could be. Do the best he could do. And that just so happened to be attending Yuuei, just like All Might and so many other amazing Pro Heroes had. He'd been waiting for this since he was a child. Striving as a Quirkless child to get the best grades, and know the most knowledge, and working himself to the absolute bone in training with All Might these past few months so he could inherit the Quirk that would change his life.

And he'd pulled it off.

Here he was, stood outside the Yuuei High School gates, the famous Yuuei uniform of slacks, a white button-up, the gray school jacket, and a bright red tie that matched his own well-loved red sneakers, hugging his body.

He'd made it.

Only a handful of teens made it here. Only one in three-hundred students were accepted into Yuuei, not even mentioning the forty out of thousands of eager Entrance Exam participants who managed to

claim a spot in the elite Hero Class programs. Twenty students per each Hero Class. Only two— class 1-A and 1-B.

And he was one of those select few. He'd made it into class 1-A too—how incredible was that? A Quirkless Deku stood outside this elite Hero school. Well, he supposed he wasn't really a Quirkless Deku anymore—not with One for All coursing through his veins, but still, the sentiment hung strong, because Izuku had always been Quirkless.

With a breath to calm himself, the green-haired teens finally took those last few steps in past the gates, falling into step with a crowd of other excited students ready to either start at this amazing school, or continue their school journey into becoming full-fledged heroes.

He followed along into the school before branching off in an attempt to locate his homeroom classroom—class 1-A. He was never going to get tired of saying that.

The halls were long and classrooms sparsely placed. As the time before the bell started to trickle down, Izuku picked up his pace. He did not want to be late on his first day of school. Not here. Not at Yuuei.

Finally, after what felt like miles of panicked running, he located his new classroom. The door stretched up close to the ceiling, and Izuku had never *felt* shorter in his life. He'd always been short, but he'd never felt it like this.

Still, a tall door wasn't going to stop him from achieving his dreams, so with deep breath, he slid the door open.

The class was already busting with activity from the other accepted students. Izuku wasn't surprised to see Kacchan with his feet kicked up on the desk he was sitting at. His was getting lectured by another boy he remembers seeing at the Entrance Exam, but neither had seemed to notice him. Yet.

When he does get noticed though, it's simply from the tall boy with glasses and Kacchan glancing in his direction. The guy with glasses regards him uncertainly, "it's him," he says slowly, and then everyone's looking at him. The feeling of all these student's eyes snapping towards him makes him want to crumble to the floor in a strange kind of embarrassment he can't seem to place.

And panic instantly rises to his chest. He knows his cheeks flush lightly at having all the attention on him—growing up, attention was

never a good thing. If you didn't have something beyond exciting to show and share, attention meant nothing good.

Izuku's sure he's sputtering nonsense, because that's what he does when he's nervous. He has half a mind to turn and leave, but he's worked too hard, and come too far to even entertain the thought. This was where he belonged, whether he fit in around here or not.

To his genuine surprise, the tall, dark haired boy struts towards him in a stern, yet pleasant greeting, "Good morning. My name is Iida Tenya from the--"

"Y-yeah—I-I know," Izuku holds his hands up in a placating gesture. He'd heard this guy, Iida, introduce himself to Kacchan the exact same way, and now that he hears the name, he remembers it from the Entrance Exam too. "I'm... Midoriya Izuku," he introduces himself in return. "S-super nice to meet you."

He hears the wobble in his own voice, but it's definitely just nerves.

They talk a bit more, well, Iida talks more if he's honest. Izuku just listens to him talk with wide eyes. He honestly hadn't known anything about the exam—hadn't figured much more out that Iida had he's sure, but he couldn't in good conscious leave another student—especially one who'd been so kind to him—to fend for themselves when he could help.

He only draws his attention away from Iida when another voice interrupts him—a girl's voice.

"Hey! I recognize that messed up hair!" when he swirls around to see who the voice belonged to, he gapes when he sees the girl who'd stopped him from falling before he'd even made it into the school for the exam, who also happens to be the one he'd in turn saved after she'd gotten caught under some rubble from the Zero-Pointer. "Falling boy!"

She keeps talking, but for some reason he can't seem to keep up. Maybe it's the nerves, or the fact that not many people ever really show any interest in him. She seems happy—all bright eyes and wide grins as she talks. He likes her, he decides.

Or, maybe it's the fact that he owes this, his place in this program, to the girl. If she hadn't offered up some of her points to him after the exam, he's not sure he would've made it in. So, he thanks her diligently, cheeks heating up as he bows his head in a grateful gesture.

If he's honest, he doesn't really remember a lot of the conversation following that. They're rambling back and forth, and he's not sure they're on the same page, but the conversation flows easily enough. He's a bit overwhelmed by all this; she's excited, and he's excited too. But it's nice to just talk to someone, and this girl seems like a kind person—maybe they could be friends? If she wants, at least!

She's still talking excitedly about orientation, and meeting their classmates and teachers when a new voice, an older voice that sounds like it's been worn down over the years cuts her off sharply, "if you're just here to make friends, then you can pack up your stuff now."

Izuku gasps, looking beyond the girl and into the hallways, where a yellow log of fabric is laying along the floor. There's a face peeking out, and the features match up with the voice—tired and worn. Like he doesn't quite want to be there, but is out of obligation.

There's a moment's pause—the girl jumps away from the figure on the floor in surprise, joining Izuku at his side, and Izuku can feel Iida's unnerving gaze over his shoulder on the figure as well.

The yellow sleeping bag crinkles a little as the figure inside moves. He lets out a heavy sigh before speaking again, "welcome to Yuuei's Hero Course."

The sleeping bag unzips just enough for the man's hand to lift something to his mouth—a pouch of some sort, before he finally pulls himself to his feet, unzips all the way and lets the yellow fabric pool around his feet. They watch uncertainly, but the man doesn't seem phased in the slightest.

"It took eight seconds before you all to shut up. That's not gonna work." Izuku can do nothing more than stare at the man talks, voice low and monotonous. He steps out of his sleeping bag and collects it from the ground as he continues, "time is precious. Rational students would understand that."

The man surveys the three of them with tired eyes before his gaze shifts to the rest of the class, "hello," even that sounded bland and exhausted, "I'm Aizawa Shota. Your teacher."

And that... well, that's not quite what Izuku was expecting. And if the collective gasp from the rest of the class is anything to go off, he's not alone. Still, the man is undeterred. Maybe he's always like this, so he's used to these kinds of reactions from people—but Izuku still feels a bit bad. This is their Sensei, after all. They should be respecting him.

“Right, let’s get to it,” the man huffs, digging through his sleeping bag before pulling out a uniform. It’s the P.E. uniform, Izuku notes. He only knows this from watching the UA Sports Festival on TV for the past couple years. “Put these on and head outside.”

It’s only then that Izuku notices the figure stood behind Aizawa-Sensei in the hallway. He doesn’t know how he didn’t notice the new kid before; maybe it was the shock of their new teacher inching into the room like a caterpillar, or just because Izuku’s attention has been literally everywhere else.

He’s tall, and broad. He’s wearing a Yuuei school uniform too, but instead of trying to sneak past the teacher into the classroom to avoid first day trouble, he stands completely still behind Aizawa-Sensei.

He’s just standing there, almost bored. His arms are crossed over his chest and his mouth is twisted like he’s chewing on the inside of his cheek. The look on his face strikes Izuku as odd, because no student at this school would have such a look after being one of the few actually accepted—who would be bored at Yuuei High School anyways?

The kid has pastel blue hair that looks almost fiery—no, that’s not right. Kacchan has fiery hair, and that’s not what this guy has. But he also doesn’t have curls like Izuku. The blue tufts of hair float almost weightlessly above the guy’s head. Izuku wonders if it has something to do with his Quirk.

His eyes are bright blue, but darker than his hair. They level Aizawa-Sensei a fond look before turning into the room and looking over all the students with an impressed look. There’s a bandage running across the bridge of his nose as well.

Now that Izuku really looks, this guy seems older than them. Maybe he’s not a first year after all. Izuku would guess maybe seventeen or eighteen, because he certainly didn’t look fourteen or fifteen.

The blue-haired teen moves swiftly past Aizawa-Sensei, then squeezes in past Izuku. He doesn’t feel the wisp of air that usually comes with motion, and Aizawa-Sensei, nor the other students seem to acknowledge him.

Nothing else is really said—Izuku was expecting their teacher to introduce his companion, but he doesn’t. No one bats an eye at the blue-haired teen stood at the back of the classroom observing them. Is this some kind of test? Who is this guy?

No one even glances in the blue-haired boy's direction as P.E. uniforms are handed out. Aizawa-Sensei watches over his nose, making sure they all grab the uniforms that have already been fitted with the measurements they'd handed in before the school year, and turns on his heels after everyone has one.

The students pour out of the room after him, all heading towards the locker rooms to change.

Before he knows it, he's the last one in the room, lingering by the doorway. His attention falls to the back of the room where the late-comer is still leaning against the back wall, like they aren't supposed to be heading outside to appease their new Sensei.

The blue-haired kid didn't get a P.E. uniform. He's still stood in the back of the classroom, gaze staring up at the ceiling. Izuku can't place the look on this boy's face, but it's not a particularly nice one.

It's a bit rude that no one even looked at the other boy, he couldn't even imagine being that ignored on the first day of a new class.

"Hey, uh, are you alright?" Izuku's speaking before he can stop himself. He bites his lip as the boy's attention shoots towards him abruptly, completely *surprised*, before his face is twisting in confusion and his eyebrow is arching in disbelief. "You, uh, you didn't get your P.E. uniform, I'm sure Aizawa-Sensei didn't mean it to forget you or anything. I think he was just... uhm, a bit *tired*?"

The kid doesn't say anything for a second, looks around the empty room before his gaze is back on Izuku. He opens his mouth, but freezes before snapping his jaw shut. He points to himself, blinking twice before clearing his throat, "are you talking to me?"

"Who else would I be talking to?" Izuku snorts with a nod, looking around the room as well. There's no one else in the room, so obviously he's talking to this kid. "It's just us in here, isn't it?"

The other student's jaw drops before a smile slowly starts to spread along his face until it's a wide grin that makes Izuku want to grin in return, "you can really see me? Like, *seriously* see me? I mean, you are talking to me, but you can see me too?"

"Uhm," Izuku cocks his head in confusion, "yeah? Blue fluffy hair, blue eyes? You're wearing the school uniform? Am I... not supposed to see you? Is it a Quirk? Wait, are you supposed to be invisible, because that would be so cool!"

“Not a Quirk!” the other teen chirps, and he steps towards Izuku, smiling broadening (if it were even possible). His eyes are lit up with so much excitement, and his gaze is locked on Izuku. “I can’t believe this! It’s been so long since—wow!”

Izuku forces a laugh, and rubs the back of his neck awkwardly.

He returns the grin, because it’s hard not to return so much enthusiasm. Izuku steps towards the other teen, holding his hand out to shake, “I’m Midoriya Izuku by the way. We haven’t officially met yet, right? I don’t remember seeing you at the Entrance Exam?”

The blue-haired boy pauses, studies his hand uncertainly before shrugging. “Shirakumo Oboro,” he introduces in return, hand *phasing* right through Izuku’s when he goes to return the handshake. Shirakumo doesn’t seem surprised by it, but Izuku whips his hand back when the intense chill climbs up his arm.

Oh.

Midoriya Izuku could see ghosts.

It really wasn’t as scary as it sounded. Not to him, at least.

He’d been able to for as long as he could remember, honestly. It was odd, and strange, and not usually something he’d tell others about himself, since it wasn’t genuinely taken well and accepted, but he could see them no less. See, and hear, and communicate with them. To Izuku, ghosts really weren’t much different from living, breathing people.

Looking back now, he’s not entirely sure how many of the figures and friends from his childhood were ghosts, and how many were living people, but it doesn’t really matter anyways. Even to this day, it’s hard to wrap his head around the fact that not everyone he makes contact with is alive—that he still struggles to tell the difference between living people and deceased.

He’s always struggled with it. Being able to tell who was alive and who wasn’t.

His mother says he’d always been different.

She used to fondly recall how when he was a baby, barely old enough to hold his own head up, his attention used to lull away from whoever

was holding him—his mother, or father usually, and focus with wide owlish eyes on the corners of their apartment.

She'd always laughed when she recalled those memory to him, her hand always rubbing at the back of her neck nervously.

They never did know what had him so enthralled in the living room, since neither could see what he saw, and he was definitely not old enough to recount it. They'd moved out of that apartment just before Izuku turned one, so no matter how hard he tries to remember, he can't.

That was just how it went for Izuku though.

Over the years the odd quirk of the green-haired child didn't go away, as much as his mother prayed it was just a phase. As worry crept up along her spine whenever her baby would babble at the empty couch, or crawl to sit in a corner, making grabby hands in a silent question to be picked up by no one she could see.

He babbled aimlessly through his toddler years to empty rooms and in directions where no one was sitting. His mother says he was always focused on something else. Something not really there. He chattered, and cooed and giggled to himself alone in his room, or the living room, or even sometimes in the bath in the evening—which, looking back now is a *little* weird.

No matter how hard people tried to keep his attention, his eyes would always stray from living people: his parents, family members, ogling adults trying to coo at him in grocery store checkout lanes—even the children his own age in playgroups and daycare could barely keep his attention.

His gaze would drift away; up over their shoulders, or sometimes he'd even lean around them to look behind them like he barely even noticed they were there. He'd stare at corners of rooms, and empty spaces and smile—wave his little hand like something, *someone*, was waving at him.

He knew his ability drove a wedge between himself and his parents.

His father had left when Izuku was little—just after the revelation that whatever weird ability he had was definitely not a Quirk, because he had an extra joint in his pinky toe. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. His father had departed to America in the following weeks, and honestly, Izuku hasn't seen him since.

His mother tried—she really did—but he knew she really didn't accept what he could do as well as she tried to appear too. It scared her. That he could see things she couldn't.

For the first few years of his life, he saw many doctors about it.

Medical doctors, child psychologists.

Anyone under the sun who had the faintest clue what could be happening.

A few diagnosed him with schizophrenia before he could even talk, but by the time he could speak, that diagnosis was wiped off the table. Others promised his mother that it was just imaginary friends—some children had them, and it was perfectly normal for Izuku to have some as well. As endearing as that notion was, there was just no way.

It was the last therapist that he went too that his mother finally broke down. He'd had a session, and now he was waiting in the hallway while his mother talked about the session with the therapist. He heard her cry—how he wasn't normal. How none of this was normal. She was scared. Terrified. And the therapist just kept promising her that he'd grow out of it.

Beside him sat an older man who Izuku was quite sure wasn't alive. He cocked his head at the man, who returned the gesture in surprise, before the child was looking back down at his crayon drawing and dragging the red crayon along the paper. His mother's cries permeated his ears, and the therapist was quietly consoling her.

That's the moment Izuku decided that he was no longer going to see ghosts.

Well, aloud at least. He was sure they wouldn't leave him alone even if he asked nicely. That's just when he stopped telling her about the ghosts he saw and started shouldering everything himself.

And honestly, from that point on, things got better. Though it hadn't fixed the crumbling relationship with his mother, she hadn't left him like his father had. She didn't entirely believe he was better, and he knew it. Things were still strange between them—the older Izuku got, the less he saw his mother. She worked long hours to provide for them, and he was thankful, but he couldn't help but miss her.

Just because he wasn't acknowledging his ability aloud to his mother, didn't mean it stopped.

He was known in school as the mumbling Quirkless kid. Mumbling because it felt rude to ignore anyone talking to him, and when he was little, he had trouble trying not to respond to the ghosts. Kids were cruel about anything that made someone different, and talking to something that wasn't there was definitely something to be cruel about.

He's actually glad they think he's just mumbling to himself instead of having actual conversations with the ghosts he comes in contact with. It's easier to swallow than: *Deku sees dead people! Weirdo!*

So, instead, he was known as the oddball who'd muttered to himself, and would stare off into space. It wasn't worth the fight to try any tell anyone, and he really didn't need to add fuel to the fire that was being Quirkless—why not make him a weirdo who claims to see ghosts as well?

Everything changed the day he met All Might.

The day he'd had his dreams crushed in the afternoon, when his favorite Hero told him he couldn't be a Pro Hero without a Quirk, but by the evening that same day, he was training to inherit his favorite hero's Quirk—which in itself was a *wild* concept, but if it means getting a Quirk after suffering being Quirkless Deku for more than half of his life, he would believe anything All Might told him.

He trained hard. Kept his lips sealed about his run in with the Number One Hero when he came in contact with his mother. Not that she really asked him questions anymore.

He would get into Yuuei High School, and he would be a hero.

And he had.

It had taken two legs and an arm (not his finest display of skills, but to be fair, he had just inherited One for All that morning), and a visit to a very annoyed Recovery Girl, but by some insane chances, he'd actually made it into the Hero Course. 1-A. He was officially a 1-A student, and he'd done it all himself.

The information that they were having a Quirk Assessment Test had thrown Izuku for a loop. For a second there, his brain had short circuited as he stood in line with the rest of his peers. They were all wearing matching uniforms, ready for whatever their odd new teacher tossed their way.

He should be in orientation right now—they all should. They should be getting acquainted with their peers, and meeting the other classes. Meeting the teachers, they'd have for the next three years.

But they weren't.

Instead, they were having a test.

A test on the first day.

An assessment test on a Quirk Izuku can barely control. *Perfect.*

A jolt of chills crawled up Izuku's spine as his gaze strayed away from his teacher to the blue-haired boy, Shirakumo, stood at the man's side. His hands were tucked loosely into his pockets, head quirked as he studied the lineup of students. Aizawa-Sensei was doing the same, but his gaze wasn't as carefree as Shirakumo's. His was actually pretty terrifying.

The ghost had followed Izuku to the changing rooms after the green-haired boy had turned on his heels and fled the room. He hadn't taken the hint that Izuku didn't want to, *couldn't,* talk to him.

Thankfully, Shirakumo didn't stick around long with all of Izuku's new classmates stripping down to change into their P.E. attire—he had some level of etiquette of not watching the living students change that chased him from the room.

But, to Izuku's dismay, he hadn't left. He'd just joined Aizawa-Sensei outside. His eyes lit up again when he made eye contact with Izuku, but the green-haired boy ducked his gaze before anyone else could see him staring off into space like an idiot.

"But orientation! We're gonna miss it!" Izuku manages to pull his gaze away from the ghost who'd shot him a grin and a thumbs up. He looks briefly to Ochako, before he forces his attention back on his new homeroom teacher.

Unlike Shirakumo, Aizawa-Sensei is not facing them anymore. Izuku stares at the man's back as he finally replies to Ochako, "If you really want to make the big leagues you can't waste time on pointless ceremonies."

The students around Izuku shuffle their feet and let out uncertain breaths, but Izuku can't look away from Shirakumo, who's rolling his eyes fondly. The blue-haired boy gives a light laugh and a tiny shake

of his head before angling his head to watch Aizawa-Sensei.

“Here at Yuuei, we’re not tethered to tradition,” Aizawa-Sensei continues bluntly without so much as glancing back at them. After no more than a second, the man turns the slightest bit, “that means that I get to run my class however I see fit.”

A murmur can be heard from the gaggle of students, but the man once again doesn’t seem phased.

“You’ve been taking standardized tests most of your lives, but you never got to use your Quirks in practical exams before.” He pauses once again, but like before continues on before anyone else can say anything, not that anyone’s stupid enough to even try, “the country’s still trying to pretend that we’re all created equal by not letting those with the most power excel. It’s not rational. One day the ministry of education will learn.”

Aizawa-Sensei's gaze scans over them before his attention settles off to Izuku’s left, “Bakugou, you scored the most points in the Entrance Exam. What was your farthest distance thrown with a softball when you were in Junior High?”

Izuku leers around Iida, who’s beside him, to watch Kacchan. The blonde regards their new teacher, “sixty-seven metres, I think.”

Izuku remembers that. He himself had never been particularly good in sports classes, but Kacchan had aways been strong and determined. He excelled in most of his classes, but his poor temper often lost him points. Still, he had a wicked good arm even without the added power of his Quirk.

The green-haired boy shakes himself from his thoughts, leaning back into place.

“Right,” Aizawa-Sensei nods, gaze never straying from Kacchan. “Try doing it with your Quirk.”

For a second, Kacchan hesitates. Barely a second, but Izuku sees it—and he only sees it because he’s known Kacchan since they were tiny. His eyes scan up their new teacher before taking the proffered softball into his hand and walking confidently to the outlined pitching circle.

It’s only when he makes it into the circle that Aizawa-Sensei continues on with the rules, “anything goes, just stay in the circle. Go on. You’re wasting our time.”

Izuku's not sure if their teacher means to rile Kacchan up, but he certainly does. The blonde scoffs, stretching his arms out, "alright, man, you asked for it." Kacchan arches his arm back like he usually does when pitching a softball, eyes shining with what can only be prideful excitement as he finally let's go of the ball.

Izuku knows his jaw drops. Unlike every other throw he's seen from Kacchan, ones that hit their target straight on and travel the allotted sixty-plus metres, this one doesn't. There's so much power in it that Izuku wants to burst into cheers like he had back when Kacchan was still leaning his Quirk. Everyone watches in silence as the ball is launch into the sky, leaving a streak of flames and black smoke in its wake.

Aizawa-Sensei doesn't really look impressed, but Izuku has a feeling it's about as close as they're going to see from the stone-faced teacher. Beside him though, Shirakumo is staring up in awe, fingers knotted in his own hair as he gapes, "woah— Shou, you're totally impressed. I'm impressed. That was so cool!"

Shou? Izuku gapes too, but for a completely different reason than the feat Kacchan just exhibited.

He doesn't have time to dwell on either the softball slowly descending from the tips of the atmosphere or Shirakumo calling their teacher *Shou*, before Aizawa-Sensei is talking again.

"All of you need to know your maximum capabilities," he tells them, glancing down at the device in his hand before turning towards them again, "it's the most rational way of figuring out your potential as a Pro Hero."

Izuku swears his eyes bulge out of his head when Aizawa-Sensei holds the device out so they can see the screen. Seven-hundred-and-five metres. Kacchan threw the softball seven-hundred-and-five metres.

"Nice!" Shirakumo yelps from beside Sensei, leaning around to look at the results. It blocks Izuku's view of the screen, but he's the only one. Besides, he wasn't sure he'd be able to tear his gaze off of it without the help.

Around him, his classmates sputter to life—all wanting a turn to be in the spotlight and show off what they're capable of. Izuku doesn't share the same sentiment, still gaping. How could anyone beat that? Kacchan was so cool.

The chatter continues until Aizawa-Sensei speaks again; voice low but instantly silencing them all. Sero, the boy with tape dispensers on his elbow's, snaps his jaw shut when Aizawa-Sensei looks at him, "so this looks fun, huh?"

The silence is suffocating, and it feel like you could cut the tension surrounding them at those five words their teacher had muttered with a knife. Shirakuma lets out a low whistle that doesn't make Izuku feel any better in the slightest.

"You have three years here to become a hero," Sensei tells them, voice loud but not booming. Still, no one dares look away, "you think it's all gonna be games and playtime?"

There's a beat, they're all too stunned at the cruel smile curling onto Aizawa-Sensei's lips. There's humor in his voice as he mutters the next word, just barely loud enough for them to hear it, "idiots."

"You have way too much fun with this, you sadist," Shirakumo snorts a laugh, and like the low whistle from before, a sense of dread climbs along Izuku's spine. Shirakumo glances towards Izuku, making eye contact before gesturing to the man at his side, "he's pretty scary, huh?"

Although he knows he shouldn't, Izuku's head ducks in the slightest of nods, eyes jerking to meet Shirakumo's before darting away. It makes Shirakumo grin widely.

Both of them look back at Aizawa-Sensei when he speaks again, "today you'll compete in eight physical tests to gage your potential. Whoever comes in last has none and will be expelled immediately."

Izuku thinks he might faint.

Drop right then and there as his teacher's scary grin widens. He's pleased with how they took the threat. Happy with the reactions. He's serious, Izuku realizes with a start. One of them will be expelled by the end of the class.

Shirakumo's shaking his head when Izuku's eyes dart in his direction. His arms are crossed over his chest once more, and he's regarding the man in exasperation. Exasperation, but there's still a fondness in his gaze as well. He turns to Izuku next, head cocking to the side, "he's serious," he shrugs halfheartedly, "good luck, Midoriya."

And that just makes him feel sick to his stomach. He's not sure if

Shirakumo is trying to lighten his mood, or freak him out more. A bit more sympathy would be nice?

It feels like Aizawa-Sensei's eyes are on him as he stands before them, body slouched and one hand tucked in his pocket. Beside him, Shirakumo's the opposite, standing tall, and grinning at the gathering of students.

Izuku's sure fear is showing on his face, and for some reason, he thinks that was their teacher's goal. To scare them. Terrify them. And automatic expulsion will certainly do that to a group of kids who fought tooth and nail to get where they are.

The odds are not in his favor, he knows.

He can only use One for All at one-hundred percent, which breaks his body, or at zero percent, which is right back to square one of Quirklessness. Everyone around him has been growing with their Quirks. Have had Quirk counselling to control it and work with it, and have nurtured their unique powers. They know their Quirks.

Izuku has only had One for All since the morning of the Entrance Exam, and truthfully, he and All Might hadn't had much time to practice it in the days leading up to school so... essentially, he's screwed.

"You look like you're gonna vomit," Izuku's head jerks to his side where Shirakumo suddenly is. He doesn't remember seeing the teen move, but here he is. The blue-haired boy's head is quirked in confusion, and his lip it tucked between his teeth in concern, "it won't be that bad—right? I mean, you're powerful enough to get here, yeah? Show 'em what you're made of!"

Izuku gives the blue-haired boy a bit of a pity nod, knowing full well he *just* managed to slip in through the cracks. Had Uraraka not spoken up for him, he's not sure he'd be here right now. He had zero points—the only robot he'd taken out was the one that was literally called the 'Zero-Pointer'.

"Like I said, I get to decide how this class runs," Izuku forces his gaze back onto his teacher, swallowing down the sheer dread that only bubbles up more at the deranged look in Aizawa-Sensei's eyes when he regards them all with a terrifying smile. "Understand? If that's a problem then you can head home right now."

"He's really going all out," Shirakumo huffs out, glancing to his side at

Izuku. “He’s gotten scarier, y’know. I think it’s the stubble.”

“U-uh h-huh,” Izuku wheezes out in reply, just under his breath.

He tries to listen in to the conversation going on around him. He hears Ochako’s voice again, and Aizawa-Sensei's retort. Their teacher talks of unfairness of villains and natural disasters, as well as a Hero’s duty. And usually, Izuku would be all over that, but he’s still drowning in his own head, and there’s a distinct chill at his side that give no comfort.

From the bits he manages to hear, it sounds like a pretty motivating speech, but Izuku just can’t seem to wrap his brain around understanding it. Words are going in one ear and out the other as he tries to steady himself.

He only forces his eyes to clear away the blurring haze when he sees their teacher scan down the class, eyes pausing briefly on Izuku before continuing. His finger bends in a ‘come here’ motion, an invitation, as he speaks, words loud and clear, and a bit lighter than before, “so go beyond,” he tells them, and it’s the nicest he’s sounded yet. “Plus Ultra style. Show me it’s no mistake that you’re here.”

And it doesn’t sound like a threat, but that’s all Izuku hears.

He can only hear the two words.

Expulsion.

Immediate.

He couldn’t fail now; he’d come so far. Worked so hard. He couldn’t fail All Might.

“Now then, we’re just wasting time by talking. Let the games begin.”

The games go about as well as Izuku predicts them too. He’s gotten better since training with All Might, but he’s still miles behind his peers. He’s not confident enough to use his Quirk, so he does everything Quirkless. He’s not overly fast, or strong, and honestly that’s with all the training with All Might. He knows he’s not placing well, and he feels Aizawa-Sensei's gaze on him whenever he’s not looking.

Shirakumo is supportive—or, as supportive as a ghost he’s known for no longer than an hour can be. He hypes Izuku up, and smiles

awkwardly when Izuku doesn't do so well.

Still, it helps.

One by one, the tests pass by.

He tries his hardest, but he really stands no chance. Not without One for All, but he can't break himself yet. He needs to be able to compete in all the games. He has to prove himself to Aizawa-Sensei. He's going to show his teacher that it isn't a mistake that he's here, so he's not going to bench himself. Not until he has too.

By the time he's up for the pitching test, his limbs feel numb in fear. He's already tired from the running, and grip tests. From jumping. From failing. His exhaustion is there, but he won't let it determine his fate. He's fought harsher conditions, run on less fumes than he is now, so he's not going to stop.

He stands in the pitching circle, a softball ringed with a distance tracker clutched in his hand. Off to the side, standing just on the inside of the white line is Shirakumo, who's watching in interest. His class is standing a few paces back, all watching and waiting for him to take his turn, and a couple steps behind them, Aizawa-Sensei is also watching him with a hawk's eye.

"You got it," the pastel-haired boy grins, shooting him two enthusiastic thumbs up.

"I don't know if I do," Izuku whispers back, gaze locked on the ball.

Izuku sees as the other jerks in surprise at being actually spoken too from the corner of his eye, but doesn't mention it. The only reason he's responding is because everyone's far enough away that they won't hear him, or see his lips moving. He has nothing against talking with ghosts, he just won't do it somewhere he'll be judged and labelled as insane.

"He's really not as scary as he seems," Shirakumo sighs, dragging his fingers up through his hair, "I promise, he's way more bark than he is bite. He's a softie at his core... Like a kitten. That's what makes him a good teacher."

Izuku wants to question if this ghost teen was a student of Aizawa-Sensei's, but he thinks better of it. How he knows the teacher isn't important right now. What's important is passing this test so he doesn't get expelled. And that means using One for All. He can't fail

all of them. He can't. He needs at least one good score if he wants even a chance at not being in last place.

Still he lets his head tilt in Shirakumo's direction, frowning lightly, "sorry, but I find that hard to believe."

Shirakumo shrugs, but flashes an understanding smile anyways.

Izuku lets his gaze linger on Shirakumo for a moment before he blows out a breath. He plants his feet, draws his arm back, focuses hard on activating One for All at one-hundred percent and finally throws the ball.

"Forty-six metres!" the distance tracker chirps cheerfully. And dread pools in his stomach like a brick.

"That, uh, that wasn't as cool as I thought it would be..." Izuku doesn't even have the strength to look over at Shirakumo. What... what just happened? He was channeling One for All. He felt it coursing through his veins—why hadn't it worked?

"W-what gives?" Izuku breathes out, eyes dropping to his shaking hand, "I... I was trying to use it just now."

"I erased your Quirk," Aizawa-Sensei's voice rumbles from behind him, and when Izuku spins to face his teacher, he's a lot closer than before. His hair floats wildly above his head, and his eyes are a menacing red. The scarf around his neck is no longer around his neck, and instead hovering around him like a cobra ready to strike.

Izuku knows he stumbles back, but it's his body working on autopilot. He stares at his teacher who'd just gotten a thousand times scarier than before, and that was an accomplishment.

"The judges for that exam were not rational enough." His tone is different from everything else he's said that morning. He sounds scary. Izuku's almost afraid of his teacher right now. Behind him, Shirakumo's breath hitches, and that's really not a good sign. "Someone like you should never be allowed to enroll at this school."

"Wait-- you did what to my--" Izuku jerks back, but this time it's all his own doing. Izuku finally takes notice of the bright yellow goggles hanging around his teacher's neck. They'd been hidden away in his scarf—and now everything's starting to make sense.

This wasn't just any teacher. Not just any Pro Hero. He had the ability

to look at someone and cancel out their powers. This was Eraserhead. Quirk: Erasure.

“Eraserhead,” Izuku breaths out, but he thinks it might be louder than intended when his classmates huddle up to talk. Eraserhead’s not a well-known Pro, since he mostly works as an underground hero, but Izuku still has a couple pages on him in his notebooks.

“You’re not ready,” Aizawa-Sensei tells him. His voice has levelled, and his face doesn’t look as annoyed. It even softens slightly, but he’s still cancelling Izuku’s Quirk. “You don’t have control over your power. Were you planning to break your bones again? Counting on someone else to save your useless body--”

“No!” Izuku gapes, “that’s not what I was trying to--”

Aizawa-Sensei's scarf wraps around him before Izuku can mutter another word, tugging him close. He’s silenced in surprise, nervous at being so close to his teacher. He’s pressed up against the Pro, eyes wide as Aizawa-Sensei glares down at him.

The scarf gives some leave, so Izuku steps back a step. It stops him there, and Aizawa-Sensei leans in towards him, eyes still glowing and gaze unblinking, “no matter what your intentions are, you would be nothing more than a liability in battle.”

“Shou!” Izuku hears Shirakumo squawk from somewhere behind him, “that’s so harsh!”

“You have the same reckless passion as another overzealous hero I know. One who saved a thousand people by himself and became a legend. But even with that drive, you’re worthless if you can only throw a single punch before breaking down.” He pauses, eyes softening a fraction before they’re hard again, “Sorry, Midoriya. With your power, there’s no way you’ll become a Pro.”

The words drop over his head like an anvil. It’s hard to breath for a second, but he manages to push through it. There’s truth in his teacher’s words—he knows there is, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t make his heart clench.

Izuku manages to push the emotion clouding up in his chest over the edge towards anger instead of fear and sadness. He’s not going to cry. Not now.

Instead, he straightens his mouth into a scowl and glares up at his

teacher defiantly.

The scarf unravels from around him, dropping back over his teacher's shoulders as his hair drops in a similar fashion. He blinks his eyes shut for a long second, "I've returned your impractical Quirk. Take your final throw."

And then he walks away. Izuku can barely hear his teacher's "hurry, get it over with." over the ringing in his own ears. He's used to people not believing in him, but this is a new level.

Izuku's head is ducked, unable to look at the man. He feels a chill presence beside him, but unlike earlier that day, it's welcome.

"I am so sorry," Shirakumo yelps, hands twisting together in front of him like he wants to reach out and touch Izuku, but knows he can't, "that was brutal, Midoriya. I swear he's usually not like *that*. Okay, so, uhm, maybe there's *some* bite in there, but I stand by what I said—he's really not like this most of the time. Now, what kinda Quirk do you have that he hates it so much?"

Izuku lifts one shoulder into a shrug, turning on his heels to return to the pitcher's circle. Shirakumo is right by his side, hanging close by him instead of off to the side like he'd tended to stay most of the day. Though his companionship is chilling, Izuku is grateful he's there.

The green-haired boy picks up another softball, fingers tensing around it as he stares down at it.

"If it's any consolation," Shirakumo starts off slowly, and Izuku angles his head subtly to see the pastel-haired boy rubbing at the back of his neck, "I believe in you. Shou's a bit brash sometimes, but he means well. I know you can show him you're meant to be here, huh?"

Izuku hadn't expected that to mean as much as it did. How it lifts his spirits even the slightest amount. He knows he needs to prove Aizawa-Sensei wrong if he wants to go stay here. If he wants to learn under this amazing Pro Hero and become a Hero himself.

He also knows it's not feasible to use his Quirk to the point it breaks his arm. He needs to be able to continue and compete in the three remaining tests. He won't be able to do that if he breaks his arm—even if he tried continuing with the injury, he knows Aizawa-Sensei will definitely send him off to see Recovery Girl, and then he'd miss the rest of the tests.

He knows he can't not use his Quirk, but he also knows he can't go one-hundred percent like he has been.

He doesn't bother looking back at his peers, or the man who'd told him both what he needed to hear, and never needed to hear. It was solid advice if it weren't so cruel.

He blows out a breath, arches his arm, glances over at Shirakumo's blinding grin, then throws.

The softball leaves his hand, shooting up into the sky. A whoosh of energy hit's Izuku's face as the ball flies away from him. It plows through the clouds, rising higher and further than anything he's ever thrown *ever*.

His finger shatters— the bones snapping and it's instantly a solid patch of bruising up to his knuckle. It was too much power for such a small space, but at least his arm is okay. He winces, grimaces behind a curtain of his own curls as he cradles his hand to his chest to keep himself from crying out. It hurts a lot.

Still, he forces a smile through the pain when he looks up to meet his teacher's eyes. He's never felt more like All Might than he does right now. He's proud. He used his Quirk, and he can still compete in the rest of the tests. The best of both worlds, and in the kindest regards, he hopes Aizawa-Sensei eats his own words.

"Aizawa-Sensei," Izuku forces himself to say, bottom lip caught between his teeth as he clenches down. He forces his broken finger into a fist to prove his point, eyes shining in determination, "you see...? I'm still standing."

"*Holy shit!*" He hears beside him, and it takes everything in his power not to spin around and look at Shirakumo head on, "you're *that* kid! The one who broke both legs and an arm taking out the Zero-Pointer during the Exam! You're like a legend, Midoriya, they've been talking non-stop about you! That like, explains a whole lot. Wow, talk about a missing puzzle piece, eh?"

Shirakumo lets out a deep breath after the ramble before launching right back into it, "look at him! Hah! You showed him, Midoriya! That's the look of disbelief pride! Man, I wish I saw that face more, too bad the bastard's usually right."

"Really?" Izuku whispers, ducking his head so no one can see, "looks like annoyance to me."

“Oh, yeah, definitely! He’s totally annoyed too!” Shirakumo laughs loudly, and it would be contagious, if he weren’t in so much pain. Izuku knows if he shows too much, there’s the chance Aizawa-Sensei will send him to Recovery Girl anyways. “He hates being proved wrong, but he’ll get over it! I don’t think anyone can be mad at that killer throw!”

Izuku raises an eyebrow, cocking his head as he opens his mouth to reply, but instead a scarily familiar voice rips through the air instead, “HEY! DEKU, YOU BASTARD!”

Well, someone can be mad.

Izuku turns to face Kacchan sprinting in his direction. The green-haired boy is quick to cowering back when he notices his childhood friend charging straight at him, palm crackling in preparation to explode Izuku when he’s close enough, “TELL ME HOW YOU DID THAT, OR YOU’RE DEAD!”

Izuku ducks his head and puts his arms up as some form of protection and waits for impact. Waits to feel Kacchan’s Quirk against his skin like he always does, but it doesn’t come.

When he cracks his eyes open, Kacchan’s hand is reaching out, but he’s stuck in place. The green-haired boy feels the chill of Shirakumo behind him, but his attention is on Kacchan.

The blonde boy is wrapped up in Aizawa-Sensei's scarf like Izuku had been earlier. He’s restrained, palm free of crackling explosions and flames. He’s fighting the scarf, body trembling against the strength of it, “What? W-why the hell is your damn scarf so strong?”

Izuku’s gaze travels up the scarf to his teacher, where he sees the man glaring at Kacchan. Eyes boring into the teen with a fiery look. He looks the scariest he has all morning, but there’s something different in this look. How he’s looking at Kacchan.

It’s different from the one the class got, and the one Izuku himself got. There’s no lenience in this one. Nothing soft about it. It’s a hard look. Hard and filled with contained anger.

“Because it’s a capture weapon made out of carbon fiber and a special metal alloy.” There’s a downward turn of Aizawa-Sensei's lips. His tone is equally as hard as his gaze when he speaks again, “stand down.”

Izuku manages to glance at his peers, fear still thrumming in his veins. They all look as nervous as he feels, so he knows he's not the only one scared of the look on their Sensei's face. "It would be wise to avoid making me use my Quirk so much. It gives me serious dry eye."

When Aizawa-Sensei looks up, his eyes are glowing red and his hair is hovering overhead. Izuku assumes that's why there's no crackling of fire in Kacchan's palms. Aizawa-Sensei had saved him from Kacchan. Izuku knows that Kacchan could throw an explosion his way if he wanted—he was so good at using his Quirk, but Sensei seems to have already figured him out.

The moment is gone as fast as it appeared. The Quirk drops, and Kacchan is let loose. He doesn't move besides his fist clenching at his side.

"You're wasting my time now." Their teacher huffs, as he walks away, unbothered. "Whoever's next can step up."

"That guy sure is a piece of work," Izuku stiffens at the snarl of the words from his side. Shirakumo is glaring daggers at Kacchan, arms crossed tightly against his chest and nose wrinkled in a snarl. Izuku glances quickly to his side at the ghost teen before his attention is back on Kacchan like he might try a second time. He wouldn't put it past him, but then again, Aizawa-Sensei is terrifying.

When Kacchan makes no move to charge again, Izuku sidesteps away from him quickly. He doesn't want to get too close—not when Kacchan is already fired up. He accidently steps through Shirakumo who lets out a gaspy cry of *"Hey!"* as a tremble runs through Izuku's body at the coldness of the entity passing through him.

"Boundaries, Midoriya! That felt so weird!" Shirakumo is making an odd face, and it makes Izuku crack a light smile as he bows his head apologetically. "Now my insides feel like goo. Groooss!"

Izuku shakes his head fondly as he joins his peers, listening intently to both Ochako asking him if he was okay, and Shirakumo going off on a tangent about how it was rude to walk through someone.

By the time the class is almost over, Izuku is antsy.

He's sure he hasn't done much better in anything else. The only thing he'd really shined in was the softball pitch, and even then, he'd proved Aizawa-Sensei right in the sense he had broken a bone. It was just his finger, but it was still him damaging his body when using his

Quirk.

He was praying he'd squeezed by. That someone—anyone—had done maybe just a tiny bit worse than himself.

Still, it feels like someone tore out his heart and stomped on it when his name flashes up in last place. Twentieth place. He'd lost. He was expelled.

Beside him, Shirakumo sucks in a breath of sympathy when he reads the same thing Izuku had. He feels the ghost's cold energy connect with his shoulder despite the lengthy lecture Izuku had gotten earlier about phasing through things feeling *not good*. He appreciates it.

Izuku feels his peer's eyes on him. The sympathy, and pity. Kacchan is grinning, and he knows it. He didn't want Izuku at Yuuei with him to begin with, so he's bound to be happy about his immediate expulsion now.

He squeezes his eyes shut and waits for Aizawa-Sensei to tell him to leave—cringes under the cover of his hair as his whole world crumbles apart. He can already hear the words echoing in his head, he feels the shame of being expelled on the first day crawling onto his cheeks and—

"And I was lying. No one's going home."

Shirakumo blows out the breath he sucked in frantically, "I don't even need to breathe, but I thought I was gonna pass out for a second there! That was horrible, this teaching power has gotten to his head! Damn, Shota!"

Izuku too feels like he's going to pass out from lack of breathing, but thankfully the chill of Shirakumo's hand phasing through his stomach when the spirit notices his predicament makes a surprised breath stutter out of his lungs. He coughs abruptly at how the air seems to grate at his already exhausted lungs, sending the ghost a thankful look before angling his head to pacify those around him who glance his direction in concern.

Aizawa-Sensei levels him his own look, but Izuku can't decipher that one for the life of him.

Then, an out of place looking grin curls onto the man's face, "that was just a rational deception to make sure you all gave it your all!"

Izuku manages to calm his own breathing as the class erupts into betrayed chatter, but Izuku can barely hear it over his heart beating anxiously against his ribcage. He bows his head, sucking in another breath that feels so good on his lungs as their teacher tells them that they're finished for the day, and that they should grab a syllabus and read it by the following morning.

How he can go from threatening to a generic teacher is beyond Izuku.

He stares down at his red shoes until a second pair are stood in front of him. A pair of boots. A paper is waved under his face, and Izuku's attention jerks up to look at his teacher. "Midoriya. Take this and have the old woman fix you up. Things are gonna be tougher tomorrow when your actual training begins. Make sure you're prepared."

Aizawa-Sensei walks past him, not bothering to add anything else or even really look at him, but that's fine. He's survived his first class, he's not expelled, and he's able to check in with Recovery Girl and get his finger fixed up. That's a win.

"See, I told you he was a softie. Look at that—that's belief in his eyes. You totally proved yourself, and look," Shirakumo's hand phases through the paper, blowing it lightly like it caught a breeze, "he likes you enough to give you a note to go see RG too! *And*," he drawls with a charming grin, "it's only the first day! That's super-fast for Shoucchan to jump ship on someone's potential, you're real lucky, Midoriya."

Izuku clutches the note in his hand, watching Shirakumo from the corner of his eye. He's smiling so widely that his eyes are squinted, and the bandage across his nose wrinkles lightly. The green-haired boy shakes his head with a huff in disagreement, but that just makes the ghost chuckle.

"To each their own, I guess. You've proved yourself to him, now it's his turn to do the same, and trust me, he definitely will!" Shirakumo's hands are tucked in his pockets, and he's grinning that wide-squinty smile again. "Anyways, it's been fun, but I'm gonna catch up with Shou, 'kay?"

Izuku waves him off, before quickly reaching up to rub the back of his neck instead when Ochako questions what he's doing. "O-oh, uh, a bug! It was buzzing around me, but, i-it's gone now!"

"I suppose I've been called worse," Shirakumo snorts a laugh, taking

pity on the younger boy. “I’ll catch up with you later sometime, cool?”

Izuku nods hurriedly, but squeaks out another excuse when Ochako cocks her head at him.

Despite how funny that is, the ghost disappears with a wave of his hand, and a wide grin that has Izuku smiling in return.

“That’s a nice smile,” Ochako grins back, bumping her shoulder against his good-naturedly, “you must be happy that Aizawa-Sensei was just kidding about the immediate expulsion, huh?”

“Definitely,” Izuku nods, smile widening. It’s not why he’s smiling, but it’s a decent excuse. “Anyways, I’m gonna go see Recovery Girl, cause my finger kinda hurts, so I’ll see you later!”

Chapter End Notes

> You can't tell me Shirakumo isn't watching over his best friend's shoulders like a guardian angel? Also, Shirakumo and Midoriya friendship ftw because those sunshine children need to meet, and Shirakumo needs an outlet for his sarcasm!
>
> Anywho! Sorry if this was boring, it's a self indulgent fic I thought I'd post on here in case anyone's interested! Tags'll be updated with each chapter posted if it's relavent, so watch out for that!
>
> Comments would be greatly appreciated if you have the time! I love to see 'em and they really motivate me to keep working on content! Kudos are also great to see! Also! I'm not entirely sold on the title I came up with, so suggestions are more than welcome! Now, thanks for reading, and hopefully I'll see you in the next update! <3

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Hello! I'm back again :)

Thank you so much for all the activity you readers gave the fic and the first chapter! I wasn't expecting people to like this, but I'm very glad you guys do! Thanks for taking the time to read, comment and leave a kudos! It's greatly appreciated! I've added a couple new tags, if you'd like to check those out :D

Now, onto the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After school that day, Izuku had returned home to his quiet apartment after making a stop at a convenience store to grab himself some instant ramen for dinner.

With his mother gone, there wasn't usually a lot of food in the house—but that didn't matter because Izuku didn't need breakfast, he'd always settled for a school lunch at the cafeteria, since it was offered and convenient, and when taking that option, he usually had a few hundred yen to spare to buy something for dinner—whether it be instant ramen, or a bag of chips, or even just a cheap chocolate bar.

As long as he had one decent meal during the day, he was usually good to go.

Overall, it had been a good day, Izuku decided as he stared down at the small carton of steaming water and noodles. He's sat at the dining room table, fidgeting with small packet of powdered broth and seasoning as he waits for the ramen noodles to cook.

Sure, he'd literally almost been expelled, he'd broken a finger the process of trying not to get expelled and he was a bit afraid of his new Sensei, but it had also been good too!

He had two new friends—Iida and Ochako who'd met him after school and walked with him to the train station, and there was Shirakumo too, who he wasn't sure really qualified as a friend or not? But either way, he was there too. Izuku was glad for the company of the ghost, he he's sure he counted as well.

So, he'd made three— *two and a half, maybe?*— friends on the first day, how was he so lucky? And he hadn't gotten expelled on the first day either, even if it hadn't looked good for a second there!

Honestly, what more could he ask for after how that morning's class had gone.

Then there was the fact that a *teacher* had stopped Kacchan from pummeling him with crackling palms and burning explosions? Teachers didn't do that, but Aizawa-Sensei had. Izuku didn't know what to think about that. Aizawa-Sensei scared the crap outta him with his crazy cool Quirk and capture weapon, but then he'd protected him from Kacchan when he could've turned a blind eye like everyone else?

And, on top of that, he'd made improvements to One for All. He could compartmentalize where he wanted to use it, and minimize damage to his body because of it. Sure, it wasn't bounds and leaps into understanding his new Quirk, but it was baby steps in the right direction.

He hoped All Might would be proud of his progress—and he couldn't wait to tell the Number One Hero what he'd done.

When the noodles were finally soft enough to be edible, Izuku dumped in the packet in his hand and mixed it with his chopsticks. He'd pulled out the class syllabus to read over like Aizawa-Sensei had suggested, but there wasn't anything particularly thrilling in it. He'd been waiting for this for years—he knew the basics of what this class would entail.

He finished off his dinner before retreating to his bedroom.

It was the only room in the apartment that had any personality. And the only real personality it did have was... well, *All Might*. Izuku liked to surround himself with inspiration, and what better inspiration was there than the Number One Pro Hero? And fine, maybe he was a bit of a fanboy.

The teen made his way to his desk, pulling out one of his notebooks. It was already full, but there was room to add on specific Heroes who he didn't have all the information on. Like Eraserhead. He didn't have much on the underground hero, since there wasn't much online, and like zero videos to study.

But now he'd seen first-hand how the Pro's Quirk worked, how he was

such a great hero without having a flamboyant and overly powerful Quirk. And let's be honest, that capture weapon scarf? So cool!

Izuku scribbled down everything he'd learned about the underground hero, and was pleased with how the lines filled up. It had been empty for a long time—since he'd heard whispers of the Erasure Hero who could temporarily erase Quirks.

When he was done filling all that in, Izuku put that book back in his backpack before digging out his newest notebook. There was only a handful of Heroes in this one, but he was sure it would be filled with his new classmates Quirks in no time. They were all so cool and powerful, there wasn't a doubt that most of them would make great Pros.

He shook his head fondly, flipping to the next available page.

Shirakumo Oboro

Quirk: ??

Hero Name: ??

Usually, he'd add more information he observed: like strengths and weaknesses, attack strategies and a drawing of the person's Hero costume, but he didn't know much about Shirakumo. He only really knew the ghost's name.

But still, if he was wearing a Yuuei school uniform, he had to have some kinda cool Quirk, right? He's not sure when the blue-haired teen passed away, but the development of Quirkless students being allowed at Yuuei was incredibly new, and Izuku's not sure he's seen anyone at the school who's Quirkless yet?

He tapped the tip of his pencil against the page, frowning down at it.

He shut the book with a sigh, turning in his chair to tuck it away in his backpack as well.

Maybe he'd see the ghost again tomorrow? He did hang around Aizawa-Sensei, right? Izuku would definitely see his homeroom teacher.

Izuku did see Shirakumo the next morning, except, instead of in Aizawa-Sensei's class, the blue-haired boy was perched on the front

desk in Yamada-Sensei's class. English was his first class of the day, and would be followed by all the other core classes. After lunch was when the fun really started, so the morning was more or less just regular school.

“I thought I might find you here!” Shirakumo chirped as he slipped off the teacher’s desk and trailed along behind Izuku, who moved to sit at his own desk. “I took a peek at your schedule, and saw you have English with Hizashi. I’m usually hanging around with him in the mornings anyways, because Shou’s usually asleep until he starts teaching, y’know?”

Izuku ducked his head in a nod, shuffling his books out of his backpack.

He hadn’t met Present Mic-Sensei yet, since the whole first day had been dedicated to the Quirk Apprehension test. He’d seen the blonde-haired teacher around, and had couple pages on him in his notebook, but he hadn’t met him.

Izuku watched out of the corner of his eye as Shirakumo sat on his desktop. He took up some space, but it didn’t bother Izuku. In fact, a smile slipped onto his lips as he rolled his pencil towards the ghost. It, as expected, rolled though him, prompting a yelp of surprise from the apparition.

The green-haired boy jerked his attention around the room to see if anyone was looking at him before speaking under his breath to the ghost, “not that I mind you sitting on my desk, I just might accidentally go through you. Just as a warning.”

“No biggie,” Shirakumo replied easily, sporting his grin, “just don’t touch my butt, cool? Or, you know what? Do. It’s been ages since I’ve had any action. I’ll go to second base with you, Midoriya-kun, so touch my butt if you want!”

“I don’t want!” Izuku blew out a whisper that was perhaps a bit too loud considering Present Mic-Sensei turned to look at him with a raised eyebrow. Izuku could feel a dark flush crawling up his cheeks, and Shirakumo’s cackling laughter wasn’t helping. He honestly wasn’t sure if he was more embarrassed of what the ghost boy had said, or the fact that his reaction had caught the teacher’s attention.

“Okay over there, Lil Listener?” Mic asked from the front of the class.

“F-fine!” Izuku chirped promptly, rubbing the back of his neck

anxiously. Some of the classmates that were in the room early with him glanced in his direction, but he didn't draw attention for long. Even Mic-Sensei turned back to the chalk board to keep writing out English sentences.

"You're going to get me in trouble one of these days," Izuku blew out under his breath.

The ghost at his side only seemed to laugh harder, "you're soo not the first person to tell me that. And if the past is anything to go off, you're completely correct."

"Oh good," Izuku sighed dramatically, but shot the ghost a playful smile.

There wasn't much time to chat after that. The bell had rung, and the rest of the class flooded in, taking their seats in a hurry. No one wanted a repeat of yesterday morning with Aizawa-Sensei.

Present Mic had greeted them all with a loud, and excited, "Welcome to English, 1-A! Glad to see you're all still standing, which means Eraser wasn't too hard on ya yesterday! I'm Yamada Hizashi, or, Present Mic if you'd like! We're gonna have a lot of fun in here, ya'dig?"

They'd done a brief orientation with Mic-Sensei, but he didn't stay on the topic long. He seemed to want to jump right into lessons after they had a basic understanding of the school and his specific class. It was nice of him to take some of his class time to catch them up.

Beside Izuku, Shirakumo had snorted something about Present Mic cleaning up after Aizawa-Sensei, and the green-haired boy could see it.

He can't wipe the small smile off his face when he thinks about Present Mic-Sensei doing damage control after Aizawa-Sensei's class.

He wonders if the two are friends— Mic-Sensei obviously knows Aizawa-Sensei pretty well if he knows to do damage control and debrief the students on the ceremony they missed. And if they are friends, how does Shirakumo know so much about them too? How does this teenager play into it?

English class passes by quickly.

Present Mic is a pretty good teacher, if not a bit loud. He's

enthusiastic, and in turn they're all excited to learn. Well, as excited as they can be when stuck in English class learning grammar and stuff. They're all bored, but that's to be expected in any class that's not Hero Training.

They're assigned a book that they'll be reading as a class, but Izuku just adds it to the collection of notebooks he already drags around.

Shirakumo seems as laid back and relaxed in Present Mic's classroom as he had in Aizawa-Sensei's. Izuku watched him halfheartedly out of the corner of his eye. The blue-haired teen would scooch off of Izuku's desk and stretch his legs, pace around in front of the room before standing beside Yamada-Sensei. Izuku tried not to let his gaze follow the entity pacing the length of the front of the room, but he's sure he catches Present Mic watching him with a furrowed brow at one point or another.

Shirakumo seems comfortable doing as he does, and Izuku wonders how long he's been hanging around for? At one point the ghost had even leaned too far into the voice hero in an attempt to read over his shoulder, to which Present Mic had jerked up in shock, sidestepping away as a shiver wracked his body, "I should warn you Listeners now, the AC in the school acts up sometimes! Keep a sweater handy, yo!"

Shirakumo had pouted, cutting off the apology that went unheard to the Pro and instead replaced it with a light glare, "AC, huh?"

Shirakumo stepped through the blonde teacher, prompting a yelp of surprise. A look of disgust clouded Shirakumo's face, while Present Mic accidentally let a bit of his voice Quirk leak into his surprised noise. Present Mic looked around for the source of the chill before letting out a laugh and apologizing for the ringing in the student's ears before continuing on with the lesson unphased.

Izuku hid his laugh behind his fist and a well-timed cough. Still, he felt his teacher's gaze flick in his direction, but he was too busy hiding his smile and forcing his attention onto the book in front of him so he couldn't see the stupidly proud look on Shirakumo's face.

Class continued on with little other distractions.

Shirakumo returned to perch on the edge of Izuku's desk after the green-haired boy had shot him a glare for blocking his view of the board as he was trying to copy down notes. The ghost slouched with a pout, but Izuku forced his attention on the teacher and class.

“Y’know, you could use me as a cheat sheet, right? I’ve been in the class for, I don’t know, *ever*? I’m sure I could read that whole novel out in perfect English at this point by the number of times I’ve read it over ‘zashi’s shoulder.”

“That’s cheating.” Izuku scoffed under his breath as Present Mic talked of adjectives, nouns and verbs. He was already dreading punctuation because commas in the English language were so hard to understand.

“It’s only cheating if you get caught,” Shirakumo hummed matter-o-factly, “and I seriously doubt anyone will be able to catch you getting answers from a ghost they can’t see, or hear, or even sense unless I get too close to them.”

“And you’re sure you’re a student here?” Izuku snorts softly, angling his head to look at the ghost. Thankfully, he’s sat beside a window, so it wouldn’t look as weird staring out it as would for him to be staring down a wall. “Your morals are questionable.”

“I *was*,” Shirakumo snaps back with a laugh. He doesn’t appear angry, or sad, his tone taking a teasing edge, “the uniform doesn’t lie, my friend. And my morals are perfectly fine, thank you very much! I still just don’t understand the usefulness of English—well, unless you planned on touring to America like All Might, or somethin’, but if you’re gonna be Japan based, what’s the point?”

“Sounds like English is your favorite subject.” Izuku’s not sure where his quiet, sarcastic drawl comes from. The corner of his lip curls into a tiny smile when the ghost responds though.

“There’s just so many rules!” the ghost cried out, “dumb rules—how can words be said the exact same way, but spelled differently? There, their, they’re, Midoriya, what’s up with that? And don’t even get me started on read and read! It’s literally the same word, but you pronounce it differently depending on when you’re saying it!”

Izuku blew out a breathy chuckle, gaze flicking to the front of the room where Mic-Sensei was still writing on the chalk board before looking back at the ghost. He doesn’t respond to the ghost because as he opens his mouth to do so, their teacher spins around to address them.

Shirakumo lets out a bright laugh as Izuku’s teeth click together as he shuts his mouth. He shoots the ghost a glance of annoyance, but he knows his eyes are wide with humor.

Classes with Shirakumo at his side might actually be a bit harder than Izuku first thought.

Thankfully, his new ghost friend doesn't follow him to every class.

After English lets out, he doesn't see the ghost after those first few steps as the spirit follows him out of the classroom. He sees Shirakumo wave out of the corner of his eye, and twitches his fingers at his side in an attempt to return the gesture without looking like an idiot.

He didn't have a chance to say goodbye verbally, since Iida and Ochako managed to drag him into conversation as the walk to their next lesson: Math.

He almost misses the icy chill of the entity beside him, but he's content with his living friends as well. Iida isn't as scary as Izuku first thought he was—he was just stern and serious about classes and school.

And he supposed he needed a good influence on him after hanging out with Shirakumo, who wasn't... well, the greatest influence. He guessed ghosts didn't really have consequences to their actions. Not like Izuku, who could face detention, or even expulsion if he were caught cheating in anyway.

He wondered if Shirakumo was like this when he attended Yuuei as a living student, or if the carefree nature came after he passed on. He adds the thought to his ever-growing list of questions he's dying to ask.

Ochako is still bright and funny. She's friendly in a way people haven't been to him since before his friends started getting Quirks, and it's refreshing. She falls into step with them and does most of the talking; filling their walk to class with positive words about English and Mic-Sensei, as well as groans about how much she was not looking forward to math class. Izuku was in the same boat.

Their morning curriculum finishes and they're all swept towards the cafeteria in the mass of students heading there for lunch. Izuku's surprised by the bustling of students milling around and stood in line for food.

The food is a bit more expensive than Izuku's used too, but it's totally worth the extra couple dollars because it's delicious. It's cheap by all standards, but to Izuku, whose income hadn't changed since his

mother started spending less time at home, leaving him nothing more than a few bills of currency on the table to get himself by with, it's a bit on the pricy side. Still, it's cheap for the quality and amount you get, and it's the only option he's got if he wants enough sustenance to get through the school day.

He's used to food that tastes like cardboard but fills him up. The cheapest stuff the school can get its hands on, so they can sell it for dirt cheap too—what Lunch Rush makes leaves him full and satisfied. It's totally worth spending his evening money on it.

He eats with Iida and Ochako, and some of their other classmates sit at tables close to them as well, but no one sits directly with them. Izuku checks over his shoulder occasionally to see if he can spot Shirakumo, but he doesn't. He tries not to frown, and instead forces his attention on his friends.

He actually doesn't see Shirakumo for the rest of the school day. He doesn't see Aizawa-Sensei either, but that's okay because All Might is the one who's teaching their fight training!

Oboro is tucked away in the far corner of the teacher's lounge. His knees are drawn up to his chest, arms hugging them close and his chin is dipped in the gap between his knees. He's sitting on a printer, but it's not like he weighs anything, so there's no need to be worried about breaking it.

It's the only place he can sit where he's sure no one'll brush through him, or he won't get in their way. And if the printer's tiny menu screen keeps flashing '*Error*' at his chilling energy, no one'll notice.

It's surprisingly dead in the teacher's lounge at this time—just before afternoon classes are to start. The teachers here manage their time well, so they left for their classrooms at about five-minutes to the bell.

Oboro knows their schedules just from watching. He's been watching for a long time, and all these teachers, minus All Might, have been here for years.

There're only two teachers left in the room, and just watching them makes his heart warm. He's beyond glad they're still close, that they didn't let life tear them apart after they graduated—after they lost him. They needed each other—anyone could see that. He's just glad those two oblivious idiots seemed to realize it as well.

Shota is wrapped in his sleeping bag lying across the couch. He usually takes residence on it during breaks and his own free periods, and the staff always teased him that it was his couch. Shou would just grunt and look away, but Oboro knew he was content with the thought. He liked not having to fight anyone for the spot, though the dark-haired man wasn't above sprawling on the floor if it was occupied.

On the other end of the couch, with Shota's head on his thigh, is Hizashi. His mouth is moving as he reads over and marks the worksheets he'd given class 1-A that morning to gage what he needed to focus on more in depth, and what the students seemed to understand well enough already.

Oboro had tried to help Midoriya with his, but the green-haired boy seemed determined to do it himself, and the pride of the notion just made him smile. He'd been kidding about being Midoriya's cheat sheet—well... for the most part, at least.

An answer slipped here and there wasn't the end of the world, right?

The two teachers are not really talking, but that's to be expected since Hizashi is busy, and Shota's eyes are closed as he tries to get some sleep before evening patrol. It had always been himself and Hizashi who filled the silences in school, so if Hizashi's not speaking, no one is. Shota had never been one to talk just for the hell of talking.

So he too sits in silence. He'd long since given up trying to convince them he was there. It was a futile attempt really, he had so little power over the living world, and no amount of trying gave him any results.

It doesn't draw on for long.

"Midoriya..." Hizashi hums out.

Oboro's cheek settles on his knee as he angles his head to look over at the two at the mention of his ghost-seeing new friend. Hizashi's eyes are the paper he's holding up, and Shota cracks an eye open to look up at him. He can barely see Midoriya's tiny yet formal scrawl over the top of the paper. He'd watched the teen write it, knew all of his answers. He also knew what was right, and what was wrong, because he'd been watching Hizashi mark that exact paper for years.

"What about 'im?" Shota asks gruffly, eyes shutting again and he melts further into his sleeping bag. Hizashi's spare hand, the one

loosely holding his marking pen, brush some hair from Shota's face without even looking down at him. It stays there for a second before he's lifting it to check off a correct sentence.

"Nothing really," the blonde mutters as he marks off an 'x' on the paper. "He just caught my eye, is all."

"Hm?" Shota hums indifferently, but they all know it's a 'do tell' hum. The thought brings a smile to his face. It's been thirteen years, and neither of them have really changed besides maturing and growing a bit older. They're still the same Shou and 'Zashi he'd sat in the cafeteria with laughing and joking around. Well, he and 'Zashi joked around with a shared goal of trying to get Shota to crack a smile.

"It was weird," Hizashi tells him, gaze not straying from the paper. "I need to look into his files because I think he might have ADHD, or something along those lines. I just, well, I noticed some stuff today. And if he does have a developmental disability, then I wanna be able to help him along."

"I didn't see anything of the sort when I looked through his file before school started," Shota does open his eyes now, head leaning back to look up at Hizashi. "What did you notice?"

"Well, lack of attention for starters," the blond snorts a laugh, looking down at Shota with a fond smile, "besides that, he just kept looking around. I'd be talking, but he'd be staring out the window. He did a lot of muttering to himself. And, at one point, his gaze was even dragging across the room like he was watching someone pace. I get English is kinda boring if you're not interested in it, but he wasn't acting particularly bored—not like the other students."

Oboro feels his cheeks heat up. Oh.

Izuku had been right, he was going to get him in trouble at some point.

It was only the second day and he'd already been distracting him. It's hard not too though—someone sees him. Hears him. He's been isolated for so long, and now someone is there he can interact with. He keeps forgetting that Midoriya's not supposed to see him. But he does.

Still, he doesn't want to be the reason Midoriya fails a class. He has high hopes that Midoriya will become a great hero, he hasn't seen much from him, but he's got a fighting spirit.

“It’s not bad or anything,” Hizashi continues, and some of the fear drains from his chest as he listens, lips pressed in a tight line where he’s still tucked away in the corner of the room, “he seems to catch himself doing it, and force his attention back. His grade on this paper is fairly good too, considering they probably haven’t touched anything English since Junior High. I’m just a bit worried.”

“I actually noticed that too,” Shota lets out a deep sigh. “The muttering. And his lack of attention. He kept glancing away; I just assumed it was nerves, but it could definitely be something else too. I didn’t even think of that since it wasn’t in his file...”

“Huh,” Hizashi sets the paper down on the armrest of the couch with the other graded papers, finally looking down at Shota, “I guess we can see what the other teachers think after a few classes with him and watch over him for the next couple weeks. If he hasn’t already been diagnosed, maybe we could suggest looking into it... Then again, I could just be looking too far into this, it’s only my first day with him after all. Maybe he’s just an odd kid—it's not like you weren’t.”

“I resent that,” Shota huffs out lowly. Oboro can’t see it, but he knows his friend is rolling his eyes at Hizashi, “I don’t remember you being overly normal either.”

“Hey!” Hizashi laughs as if he hadn’t thrown the first shot, “I was more normal than you, Mr. Grumpypants. Our classmates spoke to me, at least.”

“Out of obligation, it’s hard to ignore that voice of yours.” Shota snorts out. “Besides, they were mostly idiots anyways, I didn’t *want* to speak to them. You're lucky I talked to you, Tensei and Oboro. Not that you three were much better than the others. And don’t even get me started on Nemuri. Being friends with you lot was irrational.”

“Awh, Shou,” Hizashi cooed, patting the man’s forehead softly, “but you loved us. Why else would you stick around if we were so *irrational*?”

Shota gives an indifferent hum, but Oboro hears the fondness in the sound.

His heart feels warm in the same way it does whenever the talk about him.

It’s nice to know they still remember him, not that he thinks they’ll ever forget. They’ve only just recently come to a place where they can

say his name without getting all dreary and despondent. It's nice to see, he's glad he's not as big of a sore topic anymore.

He'd hated the looks on their faces. The pain. The heartbreak. How the room fell silent whenever he was mentioned. They still have bad days— usually his birthday and the anniversary of that fateful day, but he's glad they have good days of reminiscence now too. They can say his name, and think back and *smile*.

He feels his own face crack a smile as the two continue talking. They've carried on from talking about Midoriya, and are now focused on another of the green-haired boy's classmates. He hasn't gotten around to memorizing all their names yet, and he can barely picture their faces, but in his defense, he's had something else to be focused on this time.

Slowly the conversation fades off to the usual silence. Shota's even breaths as he sleeps, and Hizashi's pen scraping on the paper as he marks. Oboro lets his own eyes drift shut, even if sleep is foreign concept to him now.

Midoriya is looking worse for the wear as he walks home that day. Battle training had been brutal—especially on the first day of actual training. All Might really hadn't gone easy on them—and Aizawa-Sensei was right that he needed to be prepared for lessons. He just hadn't thought to take it quite so literally.

Kacchan certainly hadn't held back either, and Iida had been a worthy competitor as well.

Honestly, Izuku's surprised that he and Ochako had won in the end. If he didn't know Kacchan as well as he did, having grown up studying his childhood friend, he's not sure they would've stood a chance at all. Kacchan was strong—both physically and in the headstrong. If Izuku couldn't predict his attacks, he wasn't sure he'd be standing here at all.

So, yeah, in the end, they'd won. They hadn't come out of it unscathed, well, Izuku definitely hadn't, but it was a victory all the same. Their first victory with their powers.

He'd spent the rest of class with Recovery Girl, and he was beyond tired. Recovery Girl had used up most of his stamina, but he was still incredibly sore. She hadn't managed to do much since he had no stamina left to give, but she'd given him first-aid treatment and an IV

drip.

Recovery Girl hadn't wanted to let him leave, but she'd caved when he promised he'd go home and sleep until morning. He wondered what that said about him that the school nurse was already keen on him.

It's late afternoon when he's finally granted permission to leave. And that's only when he also promises to return to her the following morning after resting and recharging his stamina so he's strong enough for her to heal him up the rest of the way.

It'll be decided from there whether he'll be going to his classes, or resting up with her until he's got enough stamina to fix up all his injuries.

He really hopes it's the former of the two, because he's got a feeling Aizawa-Sensei won't be too pleased with him missing class twice in a row.

When he goes to grab his backpack from the classroom, he's all but ambushed by his new classmates. They're very kind as they introduce themselves and rattle on about how the rest of the battles went. He wishes he could've been there to see them. They sounded so cool.

He tried to talk to Kacchan too after their intense battle, but his childhood friend hadn't seemed very interested in making amends or even hearing Izuku out. Not a lot is said, but Izuku manages to blurt out his piece so that's a weight off his shoulder. It feels like he owes his oldest friend a bit of an explanation about the situation, because Kacchan is the only one to really know what Izuku came from—who he'd been before being accepted into Yuuei.

Kacchan is... well, Kacchan in how he reacts. There's a lot of yelling, and it's not a nice conversation, but it's a needed one nonetheless. It actually ends on relatively good terms considering Izuku doesn't end up on the receiving end of a palmful of explosive glycerin sweat.

And after that, Kacchan heads home without another word, while Izuku goes back inside to grab his stuff and say bye to his classmates. They had all waited for him, after all.

He walks out of the school with his broken arm in a temporary cast and a sling, and a bandage is covering the remnants of his burn from Kacchan's Quirk. He doesn't feel completely awful all things considered, but he definitely looks it.

“Holy shit, Midoriya, what the hell happened to you? You look like you went three rounds with the *Incredible Hulk*.”

He’d felt the presence behind him before he’d heard the voice. Shirakumo falls into step with him, face tense with worry. He’s scanning Izuku from head to toe, bottom lip caught between his teeth.

Despite the obvious worry in the statement, Izuku can’t help his attention first focusing on the Incredible Hulk comment. It brings a smile to his lips as he lulls his head in the ghost’s direction.

“Wow, talk about a classic film,” Izuku huffs a tired laugh. “And actually, that guess isn’t too far off from the truth. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think he slammed me around too.”

“Yeah, I know,” a light smile slips onto Shirakumo’s face, and for a second, the worry is replaced, “I’m surprised you understood the reference since not many people do. ’Zashi’s a sucker for American movies—likes the old ones most. And you can’t go wrong with superheroes. I’ve seen most of those old Marvel films.”

He sobers up, frown tugging back onto his lips again, “and that doesn’t answer my question, Dude.”

“We did some battle training today,” Izuku explains tiredly, keeping his head ducked so no one sees him talking to himself. Luckily the majority of the students have already left, and his classmates were still finishing up tidying the classroom and going over their battles when he’d left, so there’s only a few people around. “I won my match, but it feels like I lost.”

“*Battle training?* On the first *official* day?” Shirakumo’s eyebrows lift in surprise. “No kidding. I didn’t stick around for all the details on how you got hurt, but Shota definitely wasn’t aware of that.”

Izuku’s shoulders lift in a pained shrug, “All Might was teaching us, and Sensei wasn’t around—Aizawa-Sensei didn’t plan this? Yesterday he told me to be prepared... You’re usually with Aizawa-Sensei, aren’t you? Was he around?”

“Yeah, that’s a big no on the Sensei awareness thing. Sho definitely knew nothing of the battle plans, or he wouldn’t have let All Might teach alone. Would never have allowed the battle training so soon—not when he’s still learning your guys’ Quirks.” Shirakumo snorts out a noise that sound suspiciously like a laugh, “y’know, those two are not on the best terms. I doubt they’ll ever see eye to eye. Shou’s never

liked All Might much. Simply a difference of opinions."

"Yeah, I picked up on that All Might and Sensei rift when Aizawa-Sensei was talking about an 'overzealous hero' yesterday. It wasn't exactly subtle." Izuku clicked his tongue with a light smile, eyes flicking to Shirakumo before dropping back down to his own shoes.

"Yeahhh... Subtlety isn't his thing," Shirakumo snorts in agreement.

The blue haired boy deflates a bit after that, almost guiltily, "and, uh, yeah, I was with him, but Sho didn't really say much about the plan for you guys. Nedzu was the one who decided All Might would be teaching the class, but he wasn't supposed to do battle training—not yet, or so early in the year. Sho's gonna be pissed as soon as he hears. We were in the teacher's lounge, and he was preparing for you guys coming back to the classroom after what was supposed to be individual exercises to get ya using your Quirks in a controlled environment so All Might could get a feel of your power like Sho did, not battle simulations!"

The older teen pauses, chewing on his lip before he continues, "Shota was confused in his annoyed way when you just didn't show up to class, but the only thing your class told him was that you were with Recovery Girl. I wanted to check on you, but thought you might want some privacy. Shota was worried about ya', y'know, but he couldn't just leave his class unattended, and you were with Recovery Girl. It was only after school was over that he'd stormed into the office to talk with Nedzu and All Might that he was told what actually happened, and I... came to find you as soon as I heard how hurt you got."

There's a warm feeling in his chest at the admission that Shirakumo had come to find him when he heard he'd been injured, "thanks, that means a lot. I'm okay now."

Shirakumo didn't look convinced, but he let it go for the time being, shoe scuffing against the pavement as they walked. He'd gone to kick a pebble, but had just phased through it, only to keep walking indifferently, "you didn't miss much in Sho's class, if you're worried about that. He mostly wanted to go over the syllabus with you guys and pick apart your costume choices—functionality and all that. That's what he does every year."

"Oh," Izuku hums out, nodding his head. "Wish I had've been there, I like my costume, but it probably needs some adjustments. I mean, it was in shambles by the time to exercise was over."

“Well, to be fair, you did get blasted!” Shirakumo reminds with a grin that doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Yeah, but villains will be a lot crueler than Kacchan was.”

Shirakumo gave a heavy shrug of his shoulder. He couldn’t refute that.

The older looked away for a second before clearing his throat, “anyways, I’m sorry I missed your battles, I bet you kicked ass huh? You did win! That’s still an accomplishment! Even if, uh, y’know, you broke yourself to the max.”

“I’m starting to get used to that,” Izuku gave a light laugh, rubbing at the back of his neck with his burnt hand, “it’s only the second day and I’m already a regular patient in the infirmary. And I already have an appointment tomorrow with Recovery Girl too, so that’ll be three days in a row, in three days of school.”

“That’s gotta be like a record or something,” Shirakumo lets out a hearty laugh. It fades off naturally, but when Izuku looks over after a second of silence, his now friend is staring at him with an unreadable expression. Shirakumo continues before he can mutter a word though, “seriously, though, all jokes aside... you good?”

“Mhm,” Izuku gives the other a smile that doesn’t completely reach his eyes, “I’m a bit sore, but that’s to be expected. I just wanna go home and sleep, really. Recovery Girl drained most of my stamina, but on the bright side, I look a lot better than I did.”

“Don’t tell me that,” Shirakumo squawks with a heavy frown. His foot scuffs against the ground as they stroll towards the train station side by side, “you look awful *now*, I don’t wanna imagine you looking *worse*!”

“Gee thanks,” Izuku snorts a laugh. “Really though, I’ll be okay. After some sleep and another visit to Recovery Girl, at least.”

“Are you sure you’re okay to walk home alone?” Shirakumo can’t help but ask. They’ve reached the train station, and are waiting for Izuku’s to arrive. “I can walk you home—I mean, I’m not much good if you collapse or anything, but I’ll panic for ya, if you do?”

“My hero,” Izuku shakes his head with a tired sounding laugh, “I’m good though. Anyways, shouldn’t you with Aizawa-Sensei, or Present Mic-Sensei? I was under the impression that’s where you tended to spend your time.”

“They’re busy,” Shirakumo sighs, attention dropping to his feet. “Shou’ll be asleep by now because he’s got night patrol, and ‘zashi’s got his radio thing tonight.”

“Right... Put Your Hands Up Radio, right? I listen to that sometimes, it’s pretty good.”

“That’s the one,” Shirakumo sighed. “He’s only live on Fridays, but he spends a lot of time there preparing everything and making his setlist of songs he wants to play. It’s super boring—worse than Yuuei classes are because there aren’t even students for me to root for. Just ‘zashi and his team of radio people.”

“Sounds it,” Izuku hums as the train finally arrives, slowing to a stop in front of them. He hesitates a second after the door opens, glancing to his side. He bites his bottom lip, bandaged arm hugging around the arm in his sling, “you’re welcome to come home with me—I probably won’t be much more entertaining that Aizawa-Sensei or Present Mic-Sensei though. I’m under strict instructions from Recovery Girl.”

Izuku shuffles his feet, “but... I can turn the TV on or something though? Not sure what you like to do, but I can help you get set up before I head to bed? TV, or music, or a YouTube rabbit hole or something? It’ll pass the time.”

“Really?” Shirakumo perks up, “you’d do that?”

“Yeah, sure,” Izuku grins widely in return, “I mean, you can do anything you’d like while I’m asleep.”

There’s a warning that the train doors are going to close, so Midoriya steps in before they do, pausing there and turning to look at the ghost, “so you comin’?”

“Sure!” Shirakumo barely takes a second to decide. The decision is nearly instant. How could he say no when the offer was so awesome? Midoriya would leave the TV on for him—he'd be able to choose the channel and everything. It’s been so long since he’s watched something he wanted to watch, “just until Shou’s patrol, so I can keep an eye on him while he’s out.”

“Yeah, alright,” Izuku smiles, but he looks so tired. He wouldn’t look quite as bad if he weren’t subconsciously slouching over in exhaustion. Shirakumo’s not sure this kid should be walking and riding the train home alone—surely a parent should’ve come picked up from school, right?

The blue-haired teen wants to set a hand on Midoriya's arm in an attempt to help keep him upright. It's a familiar movement he'd done to Shota loads during their days at school—when his grouchy-faced friend would overwork himself or stay up too long without sleep. He wants to reach out, but thinks better of it. He's just something cold right now, and that's not what Izuku needs.

"Recovery Girl really did a number on you, Midoriya."

"I'll say." The boy huffs as he flaps his slinged arm slightly as if he's waving Shirakumo off, rubbing his other bandaged hand over his tired eyes as he does. "You can call me Izuku by the way. We're friends now, aren't we?"

He pauses for a second before seeming to register what he's said, jerking upright with wild eyes, "I mean, if you want and—and I didn't mean to insinuate that we're— I-I- just you're coming over to my place, and you're staying the night... w-well, I mean, technically you'll be leaving late in the night, I guess but—"

"If you're Izuku, then call me Oboro, cool?" Shirakumo cuts him off with what Izuku's starting to realize is his signature smile, "that's what friends do, right? First name basis?"

"Y-yeah," Izuku swallows, feeling a weight off his shoulders at the acceptance, "that's what friends do."

Izuku's apartment isn't quite what Oboro expects.

It's nice, don't get him wrong. It's clean, and furnished. Wide and spacious. It's a nice living space just... it's not very *lived* in?

The apartment doesn't have much personality. There're no framed photos, or art or décor at all hung along the walls. The colours are bland and neutral like that out of a home décor magazine you'd find in a doctor's office waiting room. It's quiet—which isn't supposed to be odd, but there's just something weird about how eerily quiet the place is.

It's clear that Izuku lives here, from his backpack dumped on the couch to an empty carton of ramen on the counter by the sink. There's loose school papers and a book on the dining table, along with the syllabus Shota had requested the kids picked up.

There's a pair of All Might themed slippers on his feet as he shuffles

through the place, turning on any lights he needs as he makes his way further into the apartment. It's late in the evening now, but it's still a few hours until Shota heads out on patrol.

"When are your parents coming home?" Oboro asks with a tilt of his head. Izuku's movements have gotten sloppy, feet dragging as he plops down on the couch and grabs the TV remote. He's not sure he really wants to leave Izuku alone in his state, but he also doesn't want to miss out on patrol with Shota.

It's been routine for him since Shota started his patrols as an underground hero—he went his Hizashi on his too. It was arranged perfectly; as soon as Shota was back, Hizashi would be leaving for his own early morning patrol so Oboro could just fall into step with him instead while Shota passed out—then he'd follow them to school after Hizashi was finished his patrol.

"My mom won't be home," the boy tells him shortly, rubbing at his eyes again. It takes a second for Oboro to remember his question, but when he does, his glance shifts uncertainly to Izuku. "She works a lot; I don't see her very often."

Oboro bites his lip, interlocking his hands together in front of himself as he moves to join Izuku. He doesn't sit yet, instead watching over the back of the couch. The boy looks even more tired now that he's actually sitting. His eyes are slipping shut, but they flutter open when he catches himself dozing off.

"And your dad?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Izuku shrugs as he fiddles with the remote. "He's out of the picture."

Okayy.

"Was there anything specific you wanted to watch? You can use my laptop if you wanna watch some YouTube, but if you do that, you'll be at the mercy of auto play. TV's the same way, but we can at least check the guide to see what'll be on—what time does Aizawa-Sensei leave for patrol?"

"Midnight," Oboro answers without much thought. "And TV's fine. But, uhm, don't you think you should eat something before you go to sleep? Recovery Girl always force-fed us those weird gummies she has, but eating something would do the same thing. Nutrients, y'know."

“No,” Izuku shakes his head, “I’m not hungry. Just tired.”

He knows he should argue that—how does Izuku plan to refresh his stamina without nutrients? Even one of Shota’s stupid jelly pouches would be better than nothing. Still, it’s not his place to push—not here, or now while he’s a guest in Izuku’s apartment.

“Got a channel in mind?” Izuku breaks the moment of silence, head lulling back against the couch to glance up at Oboro.

“Hero documentaries?” Oboro suggest with a shrug. He’s really not versed on what they show on TV nowadays. He has to wrack his brain for something suitable. Neither Shota or Hizashi watch much TV, and when they do, it’s usually films. American films at that.

Shota’s more of a book person, and Hizashi will choose music over a TV show any day.

It hasn’t changed since their teen years.

He remembers liking hero documentaries though—forcing his friends over to his house and making them watch them with him. He’d be vibrating in his seat, with Hizashi’s wide eyes staring at the TV too. Shota beside them looked bored, but there was a twinkle of interest in his eyes as they watched the TV too.

"That’ll be us someday!” he remembers chirping out with a wide grin, pointing to a trio of lesser-known heroes on the large television screen in his living room.

He doesn’t even remember their names now, or where they even are in life anymore—whether they’re still heroes, or retied, or even... well, dead. That doesn’t matter though, because they’d been a staple in his adolescent years, and he’ll never forget that.

“Of course it will, yo! We’ll be the best heroes!” Hizashi had chirped back, grinning brightly as he glances over, looking at first Oboro, and then down a little bit to Shota on the other end of the couch. “The three of us’ll be some of the greatest! Like All Might!”

“If you say so,” Shota had shrugged, but his eyes glowed with interest.

“’course, we say so,” Oboro remembers laughing, tossing an arm over each Hizashi and Shota’s shoulders and pulling them in close, “We’ll start our own Hero Agency, and it’ll be awesome! You, me’n’Zashi!”

“Hey, you okay?” Oboro pulls himself from his thoughts to see Izuku watching him. His eyes are lidded, but the worry is prominent, “you just kinda... left for a second there?”

“Oh,” Oboro breathed out quietly, “oh, yeah. No, I’m good. Fine. Perfectly fine, just... It—it doesn’t matter. You should be resting. You’ve got school tomorrow, and you’re already going to be playing catch-up in Shou’s class so... get some rest!”

“Okay, *dad*,” Izuku snorts, and Oboro doesn’t have the heart to tell him that if he were alive, he’d be old enough that he could actually be his father. Well, if he’d had him at fifteen, anyways.

“Yeah, yeah,” he offers softly instead, rounding the couch to settle down beside the green-haired kid. The TV lights up the room playing old hero documentaries that Oboro can almost remember watching if he digs into the depths of his brain.

It’s nice.

Beside him, Izuku’s breath evens out remarkibly fast. His lack of stamina is hitting him hard. The kid’s face is pressed into the couch at Oboro’s side, hand curled around the remote. He looks oddly peaceful despite the injuries and the fact he’d passed out in the presence of a ghost he’d known for two days.

Oboro had thought the teen would’ve retreated to his own bedroom when the TV was on, since the lights and sounds could be distracting, but he hadn’t. The teen had drifted to sleep easily, and he must’ve been pretty damn tired to be able to do so.

He actually likes the company though, even if Izuku’s not even awake.

It takes everything in him, literally *all* his effort and energy, to tug the blanket that’s draped over the back of the couch down over his friend, and then when the younger boy is curled up in a partially unfolded blanket, Oboro slips to the floor and scooches so his legs are under the coffee table so he doesn’t risk Izuku accidentally touching him and jolting awake at the chill.

He enjoys every second of the documentaries and evened out breaths behind him.

He doesn’t feel quite so lonely.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you liked this chapter! I don't know how fast I'll be able to get chapters out with Christmas coming, and my busy Christmas rush work schedule, but I'll write when I can because I'm loving writing Oboro and Izuku friendship, and adding in zashi and zawa makes me happy! As the tag (and the scene above) said, there will be Aizawa/Yamada because I think they're neat.

As always, comments are greatly appreciated! I love reading them, even if I don't respond (curse social anxiety) but they really brighten my day and make me want to throw myself into works! Any interaction is appreciated, I love knowing you guys like what I'm making!

Now, cya in the next update!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hello! Welcome back to another chapter!

Thank you to everyone who's been leaving me comments and kudos on this fic, it hypes me up to keep working on the chapters! I'm honestly so glad you guys are liking this and the idea as well! I didn't really think anyone else would, but Im so glad you do!

Sorry if this one doesn't run as smoothly as the others, but I wanted to get it out before I leave for work today. I'll probably re-edit later, but for now, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Izuku stirs awake the following morning, it's to an alarm he haphazardly set on his phone that night before going to sleep. It's earlier than he usually wakes up, and he's not sure whether it's because he was so tired when he set it that he pressed a wrong number, or if night Izuku had a plan morning Izuku doesn't recall.

For a second, he's confused.

Why is he in the living room? Had he been so tried he'd just passed out on the couch without trying to make it to his bedroom? He doesn't tend to sleep in the living room, especially when his mom could come home at any time and be upset that he's not using his room. *Honestly, Izuku, why did I even buy you a bed if you never use it?* That's around the last time he stopped having impromptu sleepovers in front of the TV in the living room.

The next thing he notices, is that he's hugging the television remote to his chest like a plush toy. His cheek had been pushed into the top half of the buttons, so he's sure his face has button indentations. A flush of embarrassment bleeds across his cheeks as he leans forward to set the remote on the table, only to paused when he notices the next odd thing.

The TV is on, softly murmuring on about heroes. He cocks a head at it, frowns, before turning it off. He hadn't meant to leave it on all night—what a waste of power. His mother would've killed him if she'd seen, but thankfully she hadn't come home.

He reaches up to rub the sleep from his eyes, only to wince when his arms ache.

When he glances down at his arms, everything comes back.

The battle trials, Kacchan's powerful attacks burning into his arm and up his hand as he shielded his face. Using One for All on the building, destroying his other arm in the process, and passing out from pain and overexertion just after they'd finished their simulation battle. He remembers after school, and Shirakumo—no, *Oboro*, because they were officially friends now—falling into step with him as he trekked home.

He remembers inviting the ghost in to watch some TV, and... it's hazy after that.

"Oboro?" Izuku calls out as he sits up, a blanket he doesn't remember pulling over himself pooling at his side as he stretches as much as he can with the sling. He doesn't get a response from the ghost. Oh, right, Oboro had been killing time until Aizawa-Sensei went out on patrol. He'd known the ghost was going to leave in the night.

Still, he hopes his ghost friend enjoyed himself, even if Izuku had conked out minutes after turning the TV on for him. He almost wishes Oboro had've woken him to say goodbye, but if the TV hadn't woken him throughout the night, he's sure nothing short of a good shake of his shoulders would've worked and that's... not quite in Oboro's wheelhouse anymore.

Izuku takes a second to collect his thoughts, burnt arm rubbing at his eyes to try and wipe away some of the lingering sleep. The bandages irritate his eyelids, but he's not bothered by it.

He's still in his uniform he notices; it's wrinkled from the night on the couch, and he knows a shower's not looking too good with his arms still wrapped in bandages and aching. His hair's a bit mussed and a tad bit greasy from the sweat of the battle exercise, but he's got priorities to worry about. Like trying to be on time for classes even with squeezing a Recovery Girl visit in.

It's only as he's changing into a clean school uniform that he realizes what nighttime Izuku had planned when setting his alarm so early. Heading to school early so he didn't miss any classes while he was with Recover Girl. Unless, of course, she deemed him unfit to attend them, then he really didn't have a choice.

So, after he's dressed, he searches hurriedly for his backpack (he finds it on the edge of the couch), and he leaves the apartment, locking the door behind him.

He just barely made it in time for the train earlier than his usual one. The doors had shut just after he stepped in, but he still breathed out a sigh of relief. The ride was quiet, a few men dressed in business suits on the way to their nine-to-five jobs are stood around, gaps between them all since it's early enough that they don't need to press in so everyone fits. Along with them, tucked away on the far end of the train, is an old lady, who's gaze is staring out the window across from her.

It was only as Izuku was stepping off the train, bowing his head respectfully at the elderly lady when her gaze lifted to him as he moved, that he realized she was a ghost—and he'd only realized that from how one of the business men's eyebrows furrowed in uncomfortable confusion.

He'd jogged away from the train and *that* situation quickly after the realization dawned on him. He knew his cheeks were probably stark red, so he kept his attention ducked, even if the streets were barren at this time.

The school was quiet when Izuku stepped in past the gates. It was only just after six-thirty in the morning after all—classes didn't start until eight.

Though the school doors are unlocked, there doesn't appear to be many teachers milling around. He'd passed maybe two students in the quiet cafeteria, and a third one sitting in the hallway engrossed in a book.

He silently makes his way to the nurse's off, heart dropping into his stomach when he finds it locked.

The light isn't even on, so he's quite sure Recovery Girl isn't even here yet. And that sucks. Clearly his plan wasn't as thought out as he thought it was.

He thinks about sitting on the floor outside the door and waiting, but he's not entirely sure he'd be able to push himself up when she did get here without making a fool of himself. His arms are aching already, and he's sure whatever pain relief he'd been given is starting to wear off, so he doesn't want to do anything to strain or further injure his arms.

The next choice he has is going to his homeroom classroom to wait until closer to school starting to try the nurse's office door again. It's the only option that makes any sense, and sitting at his desk sounds far better than sinking to the floor, so that's where he heads.

The door to class 1-A's classroom is unlocked, but not open, and Izuku has to flip on the lights himself after struggling to slide the door open. It's neat and tidy, meaning his classmates must've cleaned up a little before heading home themselves.

He's not alone long—barely even makes it to his chair when a voice startles him.

"Midoriya?"

The teen swirls around to see his Sensei stood in the hallway. He looks tired—but that's no different than any other time he's seen the man.

What is different though, is the hint of surprise in the man's eyes. His attention drops in a lazy scan over Izuku's frame, singling in on the bandages wrapping his arms, and sling keeping his arm safely nestled to his chest.

And as odd as that in itself is, the only thing stranger about the situation is the fact that Present Mic's head peaks in from the doorway like the two had walked into school together. Like the one word from Aizawa-Sensei had the blond-haired hero backtracking.

"Good morning, Lil' Listener!" Present Mic cheers with far more enthusiasm than his counterpart, leaning in further before freezing abruptly when he too spots the wraps, "sheesh, kid, looks like you've been through the wringer."

The laugh Izuku lets out is nothing more than surprise at his teacher blurting something like that out. He knows he does look the part, but it's funny his teacher told him in such an unordinary way. In such a personal, just funny way. Clearly, Aizawa-Sensei is thinking the same thing if the look he shoots over to the other Pro is anything to go off. It only makes Izuku desperately try to muffle his last few laughs into his bandaged arm.

"Yeah, yeah," Present Mic snorts when he makes eye contact with Aizawa-Sensei. He glances back at Izuku, a worried frown curled on his lips before leaning back out the doorway, "I'm goin', I'm goin'. Ch-ill, won't ya? See you in first period, Lil' Listener— well, hopefully at least! If Recovery Girl doesn't keep ya to herself!"

Present Mic leaves with a fleeting wave, and then it's just Izuku and Aizawa-Sensei.

And Oboro.

He sees the ghost lingering in the hallway, eyebrow arched in question. He must've been behind the two Pros. The ghost looks between Aizawa-Sensei, Izuku, and down the hall, most likely on Present Mic's receding back, like he's trying to decide where to go.

He seems to decide to stick with routine, shooting Izuku an awkward wave that Izuku twitches to return before he's disappearing down the hall after the voice Hero. Izuku's not sure if he's upset Oboro left him alone with Aizawa-Sensei, or relieved that his friend isn't here to witness what he's sure'll be a lecture.

"Something interesting in the hallway, Midoriya?"

Izuku jerks in surprise at hearing his teacher's voice again, eyes snapping from where they'd been set on the ghost and towards his teacher. He isn't even sure how long he'd been staring off into space at the spot the ghost had been standing.

His teacher doesn't look angry, or upset, just tired. Maybe even confused. He eyes Izuku again as the teen frantically shakes his head. The man's own head is angling to glance out the door, before he's looking back at the child when he sees nothing of interest.

He lets out a heavy sigh, but seems to let it go. Izuku watches his teacher finally step the rest of the way into the room, moving to sit down at his desk at the front of the classroom. Aizawa-Sensei's steps are slow and sluggish, and Izuku can only assume the man's exhausted from the patrol Oboro told him about.

"You're here awfully early, Midoriya."

"A-ah, yes." Izuku nods, carefully sitting in his seat, "I thought if I came early, Recovery Girl could help fix me up before classes started so I wouldn't miss anymore lessons but... but she's not here yet."

Izuku's shoulders lift to his ears in a defeated shrug, pain sinking into his arms as he does so. It's not overbearing, but the dull pain zigzags from his shoulders to his hands.

"She doesn't arrive until around seven-thirty usually," the man explains without looking up from the papers on his desk he's looking

over. His tone is as dull as his expression, but there's something different mixed in; understanding or pride, maybe?

"Oh," the word comes out as nothing more than an exhale.

If Aizawa-Sensei hears it, he doesn't say anything. His attention doesn't even stray from the documents in front of him.

Izuku's not sure what to add after that, so he stays silent. The sound of the papers wrinkling towards the front of the room catch his attention, but Izuku can't force his gaze up. He feels silly thinking that Recovery Girl would be here so early—it's not like any of the teachers live here. They've got lives and arrive in just as the students do.

"It was a rational idea; arriving early in hopes of being fixed up and ready for classes." There's a clear level of understanding in his teacher's tone now, "Recovery Girl probably would've come in early if you'd mentioned it. I suppose you were pretty tired after spending the afternoon with her yesterday though."

"Y-yes," Izuku nods, "she used what little stamina I had left, but it didn't help very much... I... I'm sorry for missing classes, Aizawa-Sensei. It won't happen again."

"It probably will," the man sighs, and Izuku sees one of his shoulders arching in a shrug. "I'd planned on stopping by to check on you, but by the time my meeting ended, you were already gone. Did you walk home alone? Recovery Girl said she tried to get in contact with your mother, but she didn't pick up."

"Oh, no," Izuku forces a smile, "a... a friend walked home with me and... my mother works long hours. She's hard to reach sometimes. It's alright though, I made it home okay. My friend stayed with me for a while as well, so it was fine."

There's an odd look on his teacher's face when he looks up. Izuku's not sure he could place it if he tried. He doesn't look happy with Izuku's answer, looks a bit like he wants to add something else, but he doesn't in the end. His head ducks in a nod as he leans back in his chair, fixing his eyes on Izuku's slouching frame.

There's a beat of silence. "I see you broke your arm again. Using your Quirk?"

"O-only the one!" Izuku hurries to tell him, like it makes a difference at all. His burned hand flattens against the sling his arm's nestled in,

“the- ah- the burns were defensive wounds. Kacchan didn’t... well, he didn’t hold back I suppose, not that he should’ve, or that I wanted him too! And, I promise I didn’t use my Quirk on anyone, since I don’t... like you said, I can’t really control it, but the only way I could win was to use it as a distraction and then Ochako could use her Quirk on the damage from mine as a diversion and...”

Izuku let his voice fade off, wincing. Was he talking too much?

“I watched the video recordings,” Aizawa-Sensei says after a lingering of silence. “Bakugou... you two knew each other before school. Are you friends?”

“O-oh, uh, no, we’re... he doesn’t... I mean--” Izuku sucks in a breath, “we used to be?”

Aizawa-Sensei makes a noise of acknowledgment, but Izuku hears the sound as a request for him to continue. To explain it to him, so, Izuku does.

“We were friends when we were little, uh, we grew up in the same neighborhood. But then... well, he got his Quirk and we just, well, we drifted apart because he was so powerful and... and I wasn’t?” Izuku feels his Sensei’s eyes jerk towards him. He feels like he’s walking on eggshells, skirting around what he wants to say. “He wasn’t very nice to me after that... it carried on through elementary and junior high. I wasn’t... *liked*? I guess?”

“So he’s bullied you before these past incidents?”

“I-I wouldn’t put it like that,” Izuku shakes his head, “it’s just... that’s who he is, Sensei. It’s fine, really, I don’t mind! We grew up together, so if anyone knows him, it’s... ah, it’s me.”

“He burned your arm in an attack that was far too personal for the simulation battles you were doing.” Aizawa-Sensei's eyes bore into him, but it was different than the anger from the first day, or the annoyance. He was trying to understand—or make Izuku understand. He wasn’t sure which it really was. “It was reckless. His intention was to hurt you, just like during the Quirk Assessment test.”

“Sure,” Izuku shrugs, fiddling with the edge of the sling, “maybe it was a bit too personal, and... we were *all* a bit reckless, I think, but... that’s just who he is. He’s a bit aggressive, but he’s always been. He’ll make a good hero—the best hero, like All Might. I know it, Sensei.”

“That was never the question,” Aizawa-Sensei's shooting him a skeptical look. “My concern right now isn’t whether or not Bakugou will make a good hero, it’s whether or not you’re safe. Bullying is serious, Midoriya, and Bakugou’s Quirk is dangerous when used improperly. If he had no regards using it on you the way he did during training, then that’s a red flag. Something needs to be done about that, for your safety and the rest of my class’s safety. Those burns on your arm are serious, and we can’t overlook his negligent Quirk control and overpowered attack on a classmate.”

“It wasn’t negligence!” Izuku panicked, already picturing himself after Kacchan was through with him should the ash-blonde be expelled from Yuuei because of *him*, “really, I’m okay! Kacchan didn’t do anything too bad, Sensei. It-it barely even hurt! Please don’t... expel him or anything. He worked hard to get here; he deserves to be here!”

“No one’s getting expelled yet.” Aizawa-Sensei sighed heavily, rubbing at his eyes with his middle finger and thumb, “there’s potential in your class. If there wasn’t, you wouldn’t be here right now. But I can’t just ignore Bakugou’s actions either. That’s twice, Midoriya. Twice in three days of school where he’s tried and *succeeded* in harming another student. You specifically.”

“I don’t mind,” Izuku’s sure his voice is barely above a whisper.

“I do.” Aizawa-Sensei levelled him a look that makes Izuku want to shrink in on himself. “Look, I won’t do anything permanent, alright? He’ll be getting detention for using his Quirk inappropriately as some personal vendetta against you during a training exercise. That’s nothing more than school policy for misuse of a Quirk. No one’s getting expelled, but I can’t have a student behaving like that. Not a future Hero at this school.”

Aizawa-Sensei looks away for just a second before his gaze is back on Izuku, head tilting just the slightest bit as if trying to observe Izuku from another angle. Izuku’s not sure what his teacher finds as he lets out a sigh before continuing, “Bakugou has a strong Quirk, and I won’t allow him to carry on as he is. I don’t doubt he has a bright future here, but that means nothing if he can’t treat his classmates with common decency.”

It makes sense, but still, Izuku’s floored his teacher is actually trying to resolve their problems. He’s not just brushing it off, or looking the other direction. He’d brought it up—a teacher was bringing this up and trying to problem-solve. The green-haired boy feels himself nod

slowly, but it's a subconscious movement.

Seemingly happy with the gesture from the boy, Aizawa-Sensei carries on sternly, but with a certain softness that Izuku would never associate with his exhausted teacher, "now, I'll be looking into more intense Quirk counselling, or perhaps sessions with our school guidance counselor, HoundDog, for him, and maybe you as well. There's obviously some unresolved tension between you two, and stuff like that is dangerous to have in this profession. You've got to be able to rely on your fellow heroes, and I don't trust either of you to have each other's backs yet."

Aizawa-Sensei looks deep in thought, mulling over his own words before he lets out a heavy sigh, suddenly sounding more exhausted than he had before, "for now though, I won't pair you two together, or face you off against one another. I want to limit your interactions until I know for a fact Bakugou can keep himself together; *keep his hand off of you*. I don't want to risk another incident like yesterday if we can help it, alright?"

"Yes, Sensei," Izuku chews on his bottom lip, burnt arm suddenly throbbing. There's a weird feeling in his chest that this man—a teacher—is putting this much effort into protecting him. Into keeping Izuku away from Kacchan. None of his teachers had ever really cared —Bakugou was strong and powerful, the one who actually had a legit shot at become a Pro Hero, and Izuku was... the Quirkless kid.

They came from different worlds despite only living one street apart.

"I also, while I've got you here, would like to formally apologize." Izuku's head snapped up and his eyes caught the teacher's waiting one. Aizawa-Sensei was apologizing to... him? "Yesterday should not have happened. All Might let that battle exercise go too far, and because of that, you spent the afternoon with Recovery Girl and missed your classes. I apologize for not being there to step in, and I apologize on behalf of All Might for his carelessness as a teacher."

"I-it's alright!" Izuku yelped out, "really, Sensei, it's okay! Ours was the only battle to get out of hand, and that was because of Kacchan and I, so... please don't apologize to me! I'm sorry for causing trouble and wasting so much of your, Recovery Girl's and All Might's time!"

Aizawa-Sensei opened his mouth to reply, but thought better of it. His jaw clicked shut audibly, before he leaned back in his chair and let out a deep sigh. "You're really are gonna be a problem child, huh?"

“I... I’m not sure I understand, Sensei?”

“Forget it,” Aizawa-Sensei waved him off. “Make your way down to Recovery Girl’s office now, she’ll be arriving soon. Come see me after school if you get held back with her, and I’ll help catch you up on what you missed the past two classes. This is a one-time offer because this injury isn’t *entirely* your fault. Don’t make this a habit, or we’ll have a problem.”

He was already pulling out his sleeping bag for a bit of rest before he had to be awake to teach. Midoriya stood quickly, cracking a smile as he stepped towards the door, “tired after patrol, Aizawa-Sensei?”

“Ye—” the man’s jaw snapped shut mid word, jerking around to look at Midoriya, who was stood like a deer caught in the headlights of a car, “how did you know I went on patrol last night?”

“I-I Just, uh, I ASSUMED!” Midoriya yelped, shifting anxiously. “Sorry! Sorry, Sensei, I, uh, I just, well, you’re an underground hero, and underground heroes tend to patrol at night, because that’s when the most activity is, and y-you know, I’m just gonna... I’mgonnagoseeifRecoveryGirl’sinyet!”

The kid’s gone before Aizawa can even unravel the sentence he’d blurted out before fleeing. He stares at the door, blinks once, then twice before finally drawing his gaze away. That was weird.

“I don’t see the problem here?”

Izuku turns to look at his ghost friend, only to meet confused blue eyes.

It’s lunch hour now, but Izuku hadn’t felt very hungry after his time with Recovery Girl.

He’d been force fed nutrient gummies, and despite them being small, they made him feel full. He’d spent the whole morning with her—had two recovery sessions and still had residing burns that she sadly couldn’t kiss away. He was collecting a lot of scars.

Oboro had found him on his way to the cafeteria, managing to talk him into finding somewhere secluded where they could talk, which was perfect because Izuku wasn’t in the mood to be dealing with living classmates bothering him about not eating, as much as he loved them all already.

He was actually looking forward to having a conversation with the ghost—and he needed someone to rant to, someone who he was sure wouldn't tell anyone (because he was a ghost only Izuku could talk too).

That led them to the outskirts of campus where no one can see them; blocked in by trees and backs pressed up against one of the thicker trunked trees. Where Izuku's free to talk to Oboro openly without looking like a weirdo.

"He's getting detention!" Izuku repeated with more annunciation, in case Oboro didn't understand the first time, "Aizawa-Sensei is giving Kacchan detention! And he's looking into more intense Quirk Counseling and guidance counseling too. You don't see the problem with that? It's *Kacchan*!"

"Isn't that, y'know, a good thing? He targeted you. He was aiming to hurt you. He did hurt you--" Oboro gestures heavily down to Izuku's forearm, still burned and wrapped with bandages, "--why are you upset he's getting punished for it? He *should*. He was being a bully. And Heroes aren't supposed to use their Quirks like that."

"He was playing a villain." Izuku defended, trapping his lip between his teeth right after the words came out of his mouth. It was the wrong thing to say, he realized just a second too late. Oboro's face screwed up in uncertainty, eyes narrowing in on Izuku.

"*Playing* a villain, not *being* one." Oboro shot the younger a frown, "even if he was supposed to be a villain in the training exercise, he still took it too far—Glasses was a villain too, and he didn't actively try to harm the hero team. And, might I remind you, it was a *training* exercise. No one should've gotten hurt at all."

"Iida," Midoriya corrects with a sigh. "Not glasses--"

"No way, really?" Oboro cut the younger off, eyes widening with excitement, "Like the Ingenium family? Those Iida's?"

"I think so," Izuku shrugs, quirking an eyebrow in confusion. "Why?"

"Small world, I know his older brother!" He deflates a little, settling back against the tree they're leaning on, "or... I used too, I guess? A-anyways, continue. Try and prove that asshole's case to me, Izu."

"Well," Izuku bit his lip trying to remember where his train of thought had been going before the interruption, "they have completely

different personalities—Iida cares too much and Kacchan doesn't, well, care enough, I guess? But! But, that's not to say he doesn't care at all. He's got his own agenda—but he'll be a great Hero. So will Iida, but they're different people. They learn different ways. Do different things--"

"One's a bully, and one's not, you mean?"

"No!" Izuku wants to tug at his hair. "Okay. I'll admit, Kacchan hasn't been the nicest to me. I know that, but it's okay. He's always been like that, since we were kids! It's how he was raised, honestly, he's just like Auntie, just with more..."

"Burning rage? Hate? Bad attitude? Inability to be *nice*?"

"No," Izuku scoffed, shooting the ghost an unamused glance, "drive was the word I was looking for."

It was Oboro's turn to shoot Izuku a returning look of annoyance, accompanied by a scoff, "I don't get why you're defending him so hard—I told you Shota would prove himself to you, and he's trying. He's trying to keep you safe, isn't he?"

"That's another thing," Izuku points an accusatory finger at his friend, even if it's not meant for him at all. It's to vent, Izuku can see that Oboro understands the gesture by the waggish way his eyebrow arches. "Why is he doing it?"

"Doing what?" Oboro asks back attempting to bat Izuku's finger away. As they both expect, it phases through, but the green-haired boy gets the message and crosses his arms over his chest instead.

"The being nice thing, I mean, why is he acting like he cares? What's it matter what Kacchan does to me? He stopped Kacchan during the test, and he apologized for not being there to stop him at the battle training exercises, and I just... why?"

"What do you mean *why*?" Oboro looks at him in disbelief, "of course he cares—you're his student. You're literally his responsibility. Even if you weren't, he'd still care. Anyone who's seen you and Bakugou in a room together, at all, will know that he's an asshole to you—so Shota definitely noticed too. I told you, he's a softie. He'll never admit it, but he's got a soft spot for you guys already."

"But why?" Izuku tried to keep his voice stern and questioning, but he thinks it comes out more like a pitiful whine. "I don't get it."

“Why is this so hard for you to understand?” Oboro asks quietly, and it’s not mean—just confused. “He’s a good teacher. He knows bullying. He *gets* you… He wants to keep you safe, what’s wrong with that?”

“Teachers don’t do that,” Izuku’s voice comes out quieter than Oboro’s had. “Not to people like me.”

“Not to…” Oboro swallows, head angling towards Izuku, “I don’t know what that means, Izuku.”

“I’m not worth it,” the younger tells him, glaring down at his shoes, “I was never worth it. No one wanted to stand up for me. No one *cared* enough to stand up for me. No one wanted to help. No one wanted to be friends with… with someone like me. Teachers just looked the other way. That’s what they do—they pretend they don’t see it, because no one wants to deal with the *Quirkless* kid.”

There’s a moment of heavy silence before Oboro breaks it shakily.

“Wait, wait,” there’s something different in the other boy’s voice—too many emotions for Izuku to pick apart. His hand comes up to phase through Izuku’s wrist, a silent demand for him to look over at him.

Izuku does look over, ready to snap at the other boy for ghosting through him, when the ghost himself has said countless times he hates the feeling, except he freezes when he catches the look on his friend’s face.

It’s a mix of disbelief, uncertainty and utter confusion. The look surprises Izuku, who racks his brain for what he’d said that could’ve caused such a reaction—he doesn’t have to dwell on it long because Oboro treks on, voice thick like he’s trying to swallow something bitter, “back on up for a sec, you were… Quirkless? What does that even mean?”

Oh. Oh no. Had he said that? Had he outed himself to Oboro right then, while lost in a slew of bottled-up emotions and concerns? He hadn’t meant to let that slip.

“But you have a Quirk? I… I saw your Quirk. You busted your finger throwing the softball—you took out the Zero-Pointer with one hit. You blew out like four floors of the building your battle training exercise was in, I watched the video. How can you be Quirkless with power like that?”

This was a sensitive situation.

He'd said too much—had gotten carried away and forgotten it's not common knowledge he grew up Quirkless. It was a quarded secret, and even if the one person who did know, Kacchan, tried to tell others (he kinda had?), no one believed him because Izuku did have a Quirk... now, at least.

He's quiet too long when Oboro's hand is suddenly phasing through his arm in what would've been a persistent 'tap tap tap' had the blue-haired boy had any physical mass. "Seriously, what the hell do you mean, Izuku?"

"I was born Quirkless," Izuku tells him without looking over. He owes Oboro that much, and honestly, who's the ghost gonna tell? The worst that could come from this is his new friend dumping him like every other friend he'd ever had after being diagnosed medically Quirkless (which would *hurt*, but still) "I've been Quirkless my whole life. Nothing but a... a Quirkless Deku. That's what they called me in school. That's why... why we stopped being friends. Kacchan and I. He was powerful, and had a bright future and I was a Deku."

"If you were... then how'd you...? Where did...?" Oboro's sudden inability to form complete sentences would've been funny if it weren't for the fact the Izuku's sure his heart's going to pound out of his chest. What he was about to tell the ghost was his most guarded secret.

"Would you believe me if I told you you could pass on a Quirk? Inherit it directly from someone else?"

Oboro's attention slowly flits to the side, to Izuku, where they meet eyes. Oboro's lip is caught between his teeth, eyes wide in nervous confusion. The silence drags for a second before the blue-haired is blowing out a slow, self-soothing breath, "under normal circumstances: no, definitely not. But as a ghost you're currently talking to as a living, breathing, *alive* person: ...I can be persuaded."

Oboro listens to Izuku's tale. He listens, and doesn't interrupt.

It strikes Izuku as odd, since Oboro hadn't had a problem interrupting him before. He's staring intently. Doesn't mutter a joke, or a sarcastic comment—in fact, Izuku's not even sure he's breathing—which would be a concern if the ghost actually needed to breathe.

The green-haired boy just keeps going. He pours it all out to the ghost. It comes second nature, and it's almost a relief off his shoulder that this is out in the open. Sorta.

The green-haired boy talks of his surprise meeting with the Number One Pro Hero, after being the target of the sludge villain. Oboro's head cocks in interest at that, and Izuku assumes the ghost had seen it on the news somewhere, because that had blown up—especially after Kacchan had been taken hostage. The boy raves on about the autograph in his waterlogged and charred notebook from his *hero*.

He talks of Kacchan, leaving out the gory details of what his childhood friend had told him before he'd left that afternoon. He mumbles briefly, but not in detail of the things they'd said to him, and his own thoughts on the matter having lived it. He doesn't like to remember the snarl in Kacchan's voice, or how the words had sunk in around Izuku, suffocating him.

He gives little detail about his time on the roof top of that building with All Might, forcing as much indifference into his voice as he can as he tells the ghost about how All Might had left him after stomping his dream of becoming a hero under his shoe, and adds as much detail as physically possible about finding Kacchan in the grips of that sludge villain who'd gone for Izuku first.

Oboro makes a weird squawking noise when Izuku tells him that he'd been that idiot kid who'd rushed head first into the danger in an attempt to save his childhood friend. The ghost sputters, but Izuku bulldozes on before Oboro can get a word in on how *dangerous* that had been.

He talks meeting his childhood Hero for the second time that fateful day, talks of One For All, and training to inherit the Quirk. He talks of the harrowing hours he'd spent on the beach clearing away the rubbish, how he'd fought so hard to keep everything afloat—All Might, his classes, managing some sleep and eating as well.

He talks of the Entrance Exam with his brand-new Quirk, and how it was the first time he'd actually used it—how it had ripped through is body like a wildfire.

By the time he's finished, he's talked more than he has since before he was diagnosed Quirkless.

It feels like there's a weight off his shoulders, and he can breathe for the first time since he'd met All Might. Someone else knew. He wasn't completely isolated with this mind-blowing secret any longer. Someone knows.

It's almost funny that it's only now he has someone to talk too—and

not even that, but the someone he's pouring his heart out to is a ghost he'd met three days ago. Trust doesn't come easy to him, but for some reason he trusts this guy.

They're both quiet, silence bleeds between them. Izuku's said all he's willing too—just enough so Oboro understands where he's coming for. Understands his comments of not trusting authority figures, or knowing what kindness truly feels like. He hadn't explicitly told the ghost, but he seems clever. Izuku's sure he'll put two and two together.

Oboro doesn't move after Izuku's finished. He's staring off into space, completely still. His knees are tugged up to his chest, arms laced around them. His back is slack against the tree, but his head is held up stiffly.

At this point, lunch period is almost over. Izuku knows he's gotta get back to class soon, Aizawa-Sensei will maim him if he knows he's skipping class and not with Recovery Girl. He's already walking the line with his teacher—having caused so much trouble in just three days of school, so he knows he can't be late.

Still, it feels wrong to disturb the ghost, since he's obviously processing. It had taken a while for Izuku to process it as well. Inheriting a Quirk is mind altering. He sits silently at the ghost's side until he desperately needs to start heading back to school.

"Oboro?" Izuku's voice breaks the silence. He thinks about reaching out and touching the ghost, but doesn't want to cause him any discomfort. The ghost doesn't look at him, eyebrows just twitching as he furrows them. So, he'd heard at least. "Hey, listen, we've gotta get back. I can't miss Aizawa-Sensei's class again, okay?"

Oboro does turn to look at him now, still silent. His head cocks to the side, studying Izuku. He's never felt more under observation than now, and he'd been the centerpiece of many, many doctor's focus. It feels different this time, almost makes him want to squirm. Oboro now knows far more about Izuku than any other human being.

Oboro doesn't move to stand when Izuku does. Time is ticking down, and if he wants to make it to the classroom by the time the bell rings, he's gotta leave now. Especially since he doesn't have the strength, or stamina to run there, "you coming, or...?"

Oboro blinks at him, clearly lost in thought. He does, however, lift a hand to wave Izuku off without a word. His gaze drops from staring at

Izuku to looking off into the scenery of trees once more, but Izuku doesn't have the time to pick it apart like he wants too. He really is going to be late.

"Alright, well, you know where to find me."

A duck of the ghost's head is all the confirmation he's getting, so he turns on his heels and makes his way back towards the school. The warning bell rings just when he reaches the doors, so he's got a few minutes to make it to class 1-A.

He just hopes Oboro is okay. He'd feel bad if he fried his new friend's brain so early into their friendship.

"All Might left you on the top of a building after tearing your hopes and dreams of being a Quirkless Hero to shreds in front of you. You could've jumped off that building right then... you could've... you..."

Izuku looks up from his phone, jolting in surprise as a voice he hadn't known was there disturbed him.

He tried to not let the surprise that the ghost is suddenly in his apartment spook him. It's not incredibly surprising, ghost have followed him before, and he had invited Oboro in yesterday, frankly the reminder of *'you know where to find me'* from that afternoon could also be viewed as an invite, but there's still the shock that he was alone one second, and the next he's not.

He really hadn't expected to see Oboro again that day, not since he left him by the tree so he could make it to class on time. He hadn't been in Aizawa-Sensei's class, nor had he seen the ghost when he'd stuck around for that offered extra help from his Sensei. He hadn't even seen Oboro when he'd detoured to the edges of campus where they'd talked, and almost missed his train because of it.

It takes a moment to brush off the shock, before the teen gives an affirming nod, seeing no reason to lie to the ghost. He'd be lying if the thought hadn't crossed his mind, even if just for a split second. There's not many responses to your hero crushing everything you've ever wanted in life to bits before your eyes.

"Yeah," Izuku nods casually. He'd decided to not make a big deal out of the fact Oboro is suddenly here with him, and instead focus on his words.

His eyebrow arches as he watches the ghost pace. Oboro walks the line of the living room in front of the couch. Izuku's not sure he's even really paying attention to where he's strutting, because the coffee table is in his clear path, and each time he walks, he goes straight through it without a care.

He watches the back and forth for a second before shaking his head as a wave of dizziness washes over him. He bites the inside of his cheek before adding, "but he also gave me One for All right after. They kinda cancel out."

"After you almost died," the ghost's attention shoots to him, an appalled look on his face, "after they all, all those Pros, stood there and watched Bakugou suffer. You, a middle school kid who'd just had his world shatter before you, were the only one to try and *help*. No offense, by the way, just... *wow*."

"All Might helped," Izuku shrugs, setting his phone down on the couch beside him as he sits up a bit. This seems like a more serious conversation, so he's gotta be alert, "we'd both probably be dead without his help."

"Don't make excuses for him," Oboro snaps. Izuku doesn't take it to heart; not when the ghost is still pacing, and the look on his face is almost terrified, "none of them helped. They stood back and watched, and waited for someone bigger, or better, or stronger to be the one to help. They stood by idly, while two kids almost died."

"But we didn't die," Izuku reminds softly. "All Might did step in. He rescued us, and then he found me and offered One For All. He made my dreams come true--"

"Only after he stomped on them," the ghost snarls. It felt a bit like the argument was one-sided, that nothing Izuku said would deter the ghost's frame of mind. Izuku's jaw snaps shut as he sits up straight against the couch. "I can't believe this. Him. I can't believe All Might. There was literally no thought put into this—I mean, you could've died, Izuku. What if that Quirk hadda been too powerful for your body? What if you accidentally used it on someone else, and they got hurt? —not even to mention the fact using it *destroys* your body!"

"I'm learning," Izuku pouts, heart pounding in his chest. It feels like Oboro is trying to talk him out of what's already happened. It's a lost cause at this point, it's literally melded with his DNA. He's not going to give it back now.

“Of course you are,” Oboro freezes in his pacing, attention flicking to Izuku sharply. There must’ve been something in his tone, or his face, because Oboro deflates with a frown, “that’s not what I meant. You’re doing spectacular considering the circumstances—I'm mad at All Might. Sho’s always said the man had one braincell, and I’m finally starting to see!”

“That’s a bit harsh--”

“That’s completely reasonable,” Oboro huffs in retaliation, but there’s a lightness in his tone that hadn’t been there before. “Seriously, he went about this all wrong. And the fact he’s just let you... he’s let you *flounder* with it. He’s let it break you, and done nothing to help. You’ve practically been learning this Quirk on your own—no Quirk counselling, no extra help. All alone. And, *no*, a word or two here and there from All Might doesn’t count as help.”

“I’ve been learning it just fine,” Izuku sighs, already tired of the conversation. “I can compartmentalize it now, so it doesn’t shatter my arm, or legs--”

“But it does shatter your finger or whatever part of your body you use, right?”

“That--” Izuku stutters, shooting the ghost a light glare, “that’s beside the point. I can still compartmentalize. I threw the softball with my Quirk, and I was still able to compete. I knew nothing before. All Might... well, he’s still learning how to teach. But he does help.”

“Not enough,” Oboro’s tone softens, walking through the coffee table to sit beside Izuku on the couch, “sure, he’s trying, but he’s not really helping you. You should’ve been in Quirk counselling as soon as you got that power, just like when kid’s Quirks come in, it’s *always* the first step. You didn’t have a Quirk before—you had no idea what was going on. All Might should’ve been an adult. He should’ve ensured you had what you needed instead of leaving you to fend for yourself.”

“It’s a secret.”

“That’s a weak excuse,” Oboro looks away from Izuku. “It’s actually such a dick move on All Might’s behalf. Giving a kid who has no personal experience with Quirks an extremely powerful Quirk, then offering minimum assistance in learning it, and telling the kid he can’t tell anyone else. He isolated you from everything—from help and the potential to actually learn to use your Quirk without hurting yourself to the lengths you have been in the process.”

Izuku wants to refute—he really does.

All Might had graciously offered his Quirk to him. He'd offered a once in a lifetime opportunity, and Izuku had taken him up on it instantly but... he did feel isolated. He's been walking on eggshells, because he's this Quirkless kid who suddenly has a Quirk. He'd gone from the bottom of the social pyramid to the top. He had, after all, made it into one of the most well-known classes in all of Japan.

He also thinks about what would've happened had he gotten his Quirk in his childhood. Quirk counseling. Probably intense counselling at that, because of what One for All is capable of, and how his body just can't seem to handle the power of it. It did break his bones, he needed to learn to control it.

He remembers Kacchan talking about his own Quirk counselling, and their classmates raving about what they'd learned to do at counselling too. It helped. It truly did, but Izuku hadn't had the option. There was no need for Quirk counselling for a Quirkless kid, and now, he'd look pretty dumb in a counselling session about harnessing powers that's usually taught to grade-schoolers when their Quirks come in.

"Well," Izuku sucks a breath in through his teeth, turning to look at the other. Oboro is watching him intensely, studying him, "it's already done. What am I supposed to do?"

"Tell Shota."

The response is simple, easy. Tell someone who's not a ghost. Someone who can actually help in your journey. It sounds right. Sounds easy enough, but for some reason, a shot of fear climbs up his spine.

"It's not my secret to tell," Izuku huffs abruptly, masking the fear. "I won't betray All Might by telling my Sensei."

"That's the stupidest thing I've heard, Izu!" Oboro returned harshly—but it was more annoyance than any real heat, "it became your secret when he handed over a Quirk that he knew was going to hurt you. It was wrong of him to make you keep it a secret for his sake-- I mean look at you, you've had it for, what a month—two?"

"Just over two weeks."

"You've gotta be kiddin' me," Oboro wheezes in surprise, mouth agape, "that's worse!"

“Was there a point to this?” Izuku chews on his bottom lip, eyes trained on the ghost in exasperation.

Oboro opens his mouth to respond, bites his lip thoughtfully before nodding, “--yes. There was. Sorry, distracted. You’ve had this Quirk for *just over two weeks*, and you’ve already broken at least seventy-percent of your body on multiple occasions. That’s not good, Izuku. There’re people who can help with that. They may not know One for All, but they do know Quirks.”

“And Sensei’s one of them?”

“Yeah?” Oboro looks unimpressed, “of course he is. He’s been a teacher for a long time. He’s worked with difficult Quirks. His own Quirk isn’t a walk in the park to master, and look at how well he uses that. There is a *reason* he’s teaching 1-A. Shota’s the kinda person not afraid to do what’s gotta be done, even if it’s hard. If he knew you’d only had your Quirk for so many weeks leading up, he would’ve taken that into account.”

The ghost goes quiet for a second before looking over at Izuku again, “I keep telling you he’s a good guy, and you never believe it. I get it, you don’t have a good track record with teachers, but the Yuuei staff are different. Shota’s different. He’s rough around the edges, but you’ll never meet a person who cares as much as he does. He’s already in your corner, and you’ve only known him for three days.”

“Maybe he was good to you, but he threatened to expel me—almost did expel me.”

“Yeah, maybe, but he didn’t *know*,” Oboro stresses the word. His hand twitches like he wants to reach out and grab Izuku’s wrist, but they both know it’s more harm than good. “I’ll let you in on a little secret, he *was* going to expel the person in last place. He does the same thing every year. His intention on that first day, was to pick out the weakest link and send them packing as a reality check. But he *didn’t*. He saw potential in you. He told you what he thought before you even used your Quirk, and I’ll admit, he could’ve been a bit nicer, but you proved him wrong.”

Izuku can only stare at the ghost, chest heavy with both relief as well as a nauseating wave of anxiety at the thought that he really could’ve been expelled. Aizawa-Sensei had said he was being deceptive, but he truly was going to expel the student with the least potential, according to Oboro.

“Don’t look like that,” Oboro’s frowning when Izuku’s gaze drags towards him, “I’m only telling you this so you understand, okay? If he was going to expel you, he *would’ve*. If he was going to expel the class, he *would’ve*. This is the first-time in... I don’t know— since he started at Yuuei?— that he hasn’t expelled anyone. And that’s because you showed him you were a hero, even if you didn’t fully have a grasp on your Quirk.”

Izuku doesn’t say anything—can't figure out what to say, or even remember how to move his mouth really. He wants to say things. He wants to defend All Might. He wants to remind Oboro that no teacher he’s ever had cared about him. There’s a lot he wants to say, but he can’t figure out how too.

“Look,” Oboro says instead, voice coming out as a defeated sigh. There’d been a minute or so of contemplative silence. He looks Izuku in the eyes, his own dark with understanding and hope, “just don’t write all teachers off, alright? You gotta give them a chance to be a good teacher. Just... trust me, ‘kay?”

Just trust me, okay?

It’s not the first time someone’s said that to him. It’s not the first time he had trusted someone only for it to be an ill-advised move on his part. Trust is hard when you’ve grown up like Izuku has. Any trust he’s placed in anyone had been broken. At some point, he’ll have to stop being so trusting. He’ll have to stop trusting people, but for now, all he does is nod.

“Alright,” it’s soft, almost tasting bitter on his tongue. His throat feels tight, and his eyes refuse to even glance to his side at the ghost. “I will.”

When he does force his attention to the side, after a second of lingering silence, Oboro is grinning. It’s that stupidly wide one—the one that has his eyes squinting as he flashes his teeth, “so you’ll tell Sho?”

“...I’ll think about it,” Izuku reasons unsteadily, “but I do trust you, I think. I’ll... I’ll give them a chance. Aizawa-Sensei gave me a chance, right? So, I’ll return the favor.”

Oboro frowns at the first half, but smiles widely by the second half, “that’s all I ask, Izuku. I promise he will prove himself. They all will. *I* trust them.”

They settle into a companionable silence after that. Izuku's tired from the long day with Recovery Girl using all his stamina to heal him up, his busy afternoon of playing catch-up with Aizawa-Sensei, and dumping his emotions out all over the floor like an overturned handbag.

It's harrowing; letting himself be so vulnerable—but Oboro is fiercely attentive and as much as Izuku hates to admit it, he's very persuasive. Just three days of the ghost trying to get him to just talk with his teacher, and he's already worn him down to the point he's seriously debating it.

It sounds nice. He'd like to have someone in his corner. He'd like to have someone who knows he's not useless—he's trying—he really, really is, he's just leagues behind his peers. Aizawa-Sensei's not the first person he'd pick for that, but if he is going to trust anyone, it'll be the teacher Oboro seems to trust wholeheartedly.

He's not sure he'll be able to trust anyone completely. He's not sure he'd be able to handle his trust being broken again, but he's willing to try for Oboro. Who knows, maybe the ghost is right, and his new teachers are worth it. Maybe they'll actually help him?

"So..." Izuku glances to his side, watching as Oboro taps at his own knees awkwardly, "do you think we could, like, make something to eat and watch something on the TV until Zashi's done at the radio station tonight?"

"Can you even eat?" Izuku cocks his head at his friend, silently thankful that whatever spat they'd had was already in the past. The thought of sitting in awkward silence with his friend isn't very appealing.

"No," the other pouts theatrically, bottom lip jutted out further than need be to get his point across, "but I can smell it, and look at it, and be extremely envious that other people are eating it."

"Doesn't that suck?" the smile that lifts to his face is small, but real. "Not being able to eat anything, but being able to smell it?"

"Definitely," Oboro shrugs, standing off the couch and stretching out. He walks around the coffee table now, pausing on the other end of the couch closest to the kitchen, where he grins widely, "I'll just live vicariously through you. So, whatcha got to eat? Something good, I hope!"

“That’s weird,” Izuku teases as he moves to follow the other teen. He knows there’s not a lot in the kitchen anymore—he's more a pick something quick up for dinner on your way home kinda guy, but he’ll probably be able to find something to eat. “How about instant curry noodles?”

“Instant?” Oboro frowns dramatically, but the flicker of a bright smile on his face lets Izuku know he’s just jesting. “I *guess* that’ll do.”

Izuku lets out a hearty laugh at that, stepping past his friend and into the kitchen. He rummages through the barren cabinets, searching for the last instant curry noodles he remembers purchasing in a two for one sale a while back. He knows it’s hidden somewhere.

He’s unaware of the ghost eyeing each cupboard he opens in search for his noodles; how his lip is worried between his teeth, or his eyes dimming uneasily. The more he sees, the sicker he feels—what had Izuku been living off if his cabinets were so empty?

“Here it is,” Izuku turns to the other, blissfully unaware of how the grin that flashes onto his friend’s face as Izuku’s eyes flick up to his face is grimmer than before, holding out a small container of instant curry as proof. “The last one, I’ll have to pick some more up.”

“Looks good,” Oboro nods his head, smile wavering as Izuku turns back to the counter to set about getting some water heated.

He wants to say something about his observations, but he knows anything he does say won’t be received well by the younger teen. Plus, he’d already cornered Izuku about his Quirkless childhood and *maybe* pushed a bit too hard about his distrust for members of any and all authority, even if it really is for his sake. Not everyone in the world is out to get him, and Oboro’ll be damned if he lets Izuku continue living that way.

But... well, it’s one problem at a time.

Chapter End Notes

I just love Aizawa guys. Protective Aizawa is *chef's kiss*.

Also I decided Bakugou needed some punishment for being a bully, so I punished him. Aizawa is a perceptive guy, so of course he'd see the fued between them. Also I dunno how much All Might I'll write because I'm on the fence about him.

Anyways! I hope you liked this update, I'll be working on the next over the next few days, so hopefully that'll be out sometime soon! Thanks for taking the time to read this, and once again, thank you to everyone who's left me a comment! They all make me so happy to see, and I read every single one of them! I appreciate all the interaction from you guys on this, it makes me smile <3

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! Welcome back!

I honestly love this fic so much, and I have so much planned. I'm excited guys, like, seriously, I can have so much fun with this. And I'm so glad you're all liking it so much too! It's kinda crazy that this random little fic I thought up with two character who don't even know the other exists in canon is doing so well! Who've thought, right?

Okay! So, I have just a bit of housekeeping for this. Though I will be following the anime for big events (ex. USJ and Sports Festival) I will be spacing them out a bit. I mean, a villain attack on the third day of school? Crazy. So, yeah, things will happen, just with gaps for other stuff. Plus, I don't want this to just be a giant recreation of the anime, though I do heavily reference it.

Anyways! If you could check out the notes at the end as well, I'd appreciate it! Now, I hope you enjoy this new chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Over the next couple days, Izuku tries to make good on his promise to Oboro.

He tries to trust the teachers.

Some, like Present Mic-Sensei, make it easier than others. He's cheerful, and loud, watches the class and already has a vague grip on each of their personalities. He's kind, and teaches in an upbeat way that makes Izuku not hate English class entirely.

He's noticed the voice hero keeping a close eye on him, and by extension, Kacchan too, who's mellowed out to an angered silence after being called to stay after class with Aizawa-Sensei. That had been just the day after Sensei had spoken to Izuku in the morning, and the green-haired boy has a sneaking suspicion that Sensei would've done it that same day had Izuku not stayed back to catch up with him.

Izuku knows what had gone down between the teacher and Kacchan. Aizawa-Sensei had briefed him—and he's sure it wouldn't be long until he found himself in his own meeting about possible Quirk

counselling and guidance counselling, but he's still afraid to ask Kacchan about it, or draw any attention to it at all.

Still, the teen finds it odd that it's really just Aizawa-Sensei and Mic-Sensei who seem to be keeping an eye on the two of them. Present Mic too had arranged their partner activity so Izuku and Kacchan were on other sides of the room from each other. But it was only in those two classes, no one else seemed to know, or care about it.

It was odd.

Izuku once again wonders how close Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic-Sensei are if he's in the loop of Izuku and Kacchan's problems, that should've only involved All Might, the teacher in charge of the battle simulations, and Aizawa-Sensei, of course, considering he is their Sensei, and maybe principal Nedzu.

He only gets a chance to ask about it after school a couple days later.

"Are Present Mic and Aizawa-Sensei friends?" Izuku asks into the phone, walking home with the ghost at his side. Despite the cell phone pressed to his ear to disguise the fact he's talking to a ghost when the streets are crowded, his head cocks the faintest bit in Oboro's direction.

In the past few days, they'd developed a routine of sorts, Oboro joining him at home for a couple hours until either Aizawa-Sensei left for patrol, or Present Mic returned home from the radio station.

The ghost beside him trips over his own feet as soon as the words leave Izuku's mouth, sputtering unintelligible words of surprised confusion.

Izuku knows his own eyebrow arches at the reaction, but now the ghost is too busy laughing to notice. He cackles at Izuku's side, one arm looped around his own stomach like he's laughing to the point it *hurts*. He laughs until he's struggling to pull in breaths, bending over to force in wheezed gasps of oxygen.

Izuku knows he doesn't really need to breathe, he doesn't have lungs —but it's still common curtesy to slow to a stop and stand himself in the grass beside the ghost, out of the way of the foot traffic still moving about. If Oboro had any mass to him, Izuku would've reached out to pat at his back, but he knows he'd look like a fool petting air, and of course his hand'll just phase through.

He's not sure what's so funny about the question—it was a yes or no kinda thing, so what's with the theatrics?

Izuku can do nothing more than wilt with a frown as he watches Oboro out of the corner of his eye only speaking up again when the ghost appears to finally be collecting himself, "are you just gonna laugh, or tell me? I thought you said you'd be my cheat sheet."

"For classes, not your teachers." The ghost snorts between laughs, wiping at his eyes where tears have welled from laughing. "That's pretty funny. What gave you that idea?"

"They arrive to school together most of the time," Izuku mutters factually, even though he'd only really seen that once, "and they seem close. I mean, Present Mic acts like he knows about Kacchan and I, even though only All Might and Aizawa-Sensei should... Plus, you said it yourself, Present Mic-Sensei did damage control after Aizawa-Sensei's first class, and you hang around the both of them—so they've gotta be close, at least a bit?"

Oboro listens intently, a grin curving onto his lips, "all good points, all good points. But, have you... considered the alternatives?"

"Alternatives?" Izuku quirks his head, slowly starting to walk again as Oboro falls into step with him again. He's calmed down, though his face has a bit more colour after the laughing fit.

"Sure," the ghost shrugs, grin never wavering, "like the fact carpool's a thing—it's cheaper, even. Or, the alternative that teachers are big ol' gossips about their students? It's hardly a secret if it affects you all the same in every class. And I'm sure any teacher after Sho would do some damage control—Zashi's just good at it, and he's the first to get his hands on you lot, since you're his first class. And, as much as I appreciate you lumping me in with them, I'm just along for the ride, y'know?"

Izuku pouts, shifting the phone against his face a bit when it starts to slip, "well, sure, but that doesn't answer my question. Are they close? Sensei looks at Mic like he's always annoyed with him, and Mic seems very comfortable with Aizawa-Sensei."

"Welll..." Oboro flashes that wide, squinty grin, but there's more humor in this one than the usual one, "yeah, I guess you could say they're *close*, yeah."

The jocular way the ghost mumbles the words, and the bordering

devious curl on his lips has Izuku rethinking even asking the question. Oboro's good at keeping secrets and skirting around what he wants too. The perks of being a ghost, Izuku supposes.

Izuku blows out a quiet sigh, angling his head to shoot his friend a halfheartedly annoyed look before it melts into a half smile. It's more defeat than anything else, but he doesn't take it to heart. Oboro doesn't try to add anything else, and at that point, Izuku's sure what he'd gotten was all he was going to be able to get out of the ghost.

The boy bites the inside of his cheek, accepting his defeat completely with a click of his tongue that he hopes conveys the remaining annoyance he feels when he catches sight of the idiot grinning like an, well, an *idiot* at his side. The living teen lets out a huff, pacing his steps faster for a couple seconds, just enough so to leave Oboro a couple paces behind, but not to leave him in the dust.

All Oboro does is chuckle, eyes locked on Izuku, and filled with nothing but mirth.

The green-haired boy rolls his eyes, but he knows there's a grin curling onto his lips, "you're awful."

"I'm fun!" The ghost cheers, skipping to join Izuku at his side again. He sways closer, and for a moment, Izuku thinks Oboro might throw an arm around his shoulders and tug him into his side. It feels right—he hasn't known the other long, but it feels like something he'd do. The ghost doesn't—*can't*—but Izuku can almost feel his intentions, even as he blows out a breath and pulls away with a sad, lopsided smile.

Honestly, he comes out of the conversation just as confused as he'd gone into it. Oboro speaking in riddles was annoying, but he supposes the ghost likes having some mystery surrounding him... or he just likes being an evasive dork sometimes.

He doesn't know a lot about the ghost. Oboro knows a lot more about Izuku than Izuku does about him, but he also doesn't want to push the ghost away. He's hopeful that at some point his new friend will tell him stuff about him because he wants too, not because he has too.

Either way, Izuku doesn't get any real answer, because for some reason (probably the devious smile on the ghost's face), he's sure his friend is leading him along on the topic, so he's still left to wonder.

He assumes Sensei and Present Mic are friends, or at least teaching

buddies, or something. They're polar opposites, so Izuku's not even sure how any sort of relationship sparked, but he's sure they're more than just acquaintances.

He thinks about it for the rest of the day, but by the following morning, his thoughts had shifted to other things. Like his classwork, and the still weighing request from his ghost friend to talk to Aizawa-Sensei.

So, yeah, he's trying to trust more. He really is. He's trying to give them a chance, and some of the teachers seem like they'll be allies but others seem stern.

Like Aizawa-Sensei.

He wants to trust Aizawa-Sensei, he seems trustworthy, and for his part, he has been a good teacher thus far—caring and attentive in his own standoffish way, but on the other hand, Izuku was a strong believer of 'first impressions' and the truth of that was Izuku's first actual memorial impression of the man was him telling him he was as good as useless even with his Quirk, and threatening to expel him off the bat.

Sure, he'd come to Izuku's defense when it came to Kacchan, and he put in the effort of trying to keep him safe at school. As he'd promised Izuku, the two of them hadn't been paired or pinned against each other at all since the battle training. And he'd even apologized for heaven's sake, but it was still odd.

Maybe his homeroom teacher really was a softie underneath all that stern tiredness.

He had no reason not to trust Oboro, but it was just hard.

The longer Izuku put off breaching the topic of telling his frankly kinda scary Sensei of his newly acquired Quirk, the more antsy Oboro seemed to get.

He hadn't really brought it up that first week of school. He'd let Izuku settle into his classes, learn his teachers. Izuku should be thankful the ghost had given him so much leeway so he could settle into the school year.

Izuku found he liked having Oboro around. He was a positive addition to his life, bright and cheerful—yet sarcastic and sometimes

infuriating. He was like every other teen Izuku had known—yet there was something older and wiser about him as well.

The ghost had a distinct personality, and it was refreshing. Joking and teasing, yet heartwarmingly kind and sensitive. He wasn't one to be quieted unless it was on his terms, and he also wasn't quiet about his opinions. He hadn't censored himself when talking about Kacchan or All Might, after all, so that might've been Izuku's first real glimpse into the kinda guy Oboro was before he'd passed away.

For the first time in his life, since he'd been diagnosed as Quirkless, it feels like he has an actual friend. A friend who he often times forgets is a ghost. They just seemed to click, and Izuku's not sure whether that's because they were destined to be friends, dead or alive, or whether they both really just needed something out of this friendship. He likes to think it's the former, but he knows there's some truth in the latter as well.

Still, it's nice to see Oboro's true personality starting to shine through as he gets more comfortable with Izuku. He's a great guy, but damn can he be annoying.

Like now, on this Wednesday morning, halfway through his second week of his classes at Yuuei.

For the most part Oboro had tried to keep himself quiet and contained during classes. He was there, in English and Hero Training, as well as Homeroom, but he didn't talk much, or tease like he had those first two days. His presence during classes had been a 'seen not heard' sort of ordeal, which was okay. That was the first week, at least.

That seems to have worn off by now.

He'd been a bit more annoying as the week carried on. Watching over Izuku's shoulder, adding input that doesn't really help—trying to help more than Izuku would like with his classwork and stuff. It's been little stuff; easily ignored, or deterred by a stern snipe from Izuku, but there's something different in it today.

"That one's wrong," Oboro's leaning over Izuku's shoulder, arms crossed over the back of his chair, and he's sure if the ghost could, his chin would be hooked over Izuku's shoulder. He'd gotten used to the icy chill, and it now only gets a reaction out of him when Oboro purposely phases through him, or they accidentally brush over one another.

Izuku tightens his hand on his pencil, afraid for a second that One for All would activate and he'd crush the wood. "Don't help me," Izuku hisses under his breath, studying the answer he'd written before finding his mistake and erasing it was glare shot over his shoulder.

"But you're doing it wrong," the ghost insists without a care that he was literally feeding Izuku test answers. Oboro's head lulls to catch Izuku's glare, where he grins teasingly. "Like number three, you put the comma in the wrong spot."

"This is cheating," Izuku glares down at his work, not seeing the mistake. "Stop."

"It's only cheating if you get caught," Oboro shrugs, leaning even closer over Izuku's shoulder, "that's the wrong punctuation in question six too, by the way."

"Knock it off," Izuku whispers in annoyance, and he has half a mind to throw his hand back through Oboro's face. And he would've, had it not been for the fact that it would be like punching him in the face. "I can do this alone. Really, I insist I do this alone. Thanks, but no thanks."

"Yeah, maybe, but you've gotta accept help somewhere in your life." Izuku feels a weight form in his stomach at the words, "if you're not gonna let Shota help ya with your Quirk, I'll at least help you with your English grade. Whether you want that or not."

"I don't need help," the green-haired boy snarls softly. His attention flicks up to Mic-Sensei, who is still focused on whatever he's writing up front. He's giving them all of class to write the test, only looking up every so often to check for raised hands, but the thought that Izuku is technically cheating, whether he's trying to or not, makes his stomach churn, "this is a test."

"Whether you want it or not," Oboro repeats firmly. "I'm sorry, Izu, but I can't just sit back and watch you work yourself to the ground. You're not alone in this anymore, and if you won't accept help for yourself, I'll give it to you—even if it's not where you really want it."

"So, you're blackmailing me," Izuku narrows his eyes, attention cocking to look at the ghost. "That's heroic."

"I wouldn't call it that," Oboro grins.

"Threatening, then."

“That’s a bit closer,” the ghost concedes. He’s got a smile on his face, but it falls when he looks over at Izuku, “I know you don’t want too. I get it. You don’t trust teachers. But you’re going to run yourself into the ground if you keep shouldering everything alone. I went to school here too. I know the work load. You can’t do this alone, Izu. I’m just trying to help...”

“I don’t need help with English,” the boy mutters, dropping his head down onto the desk. His forehead rests on the edge, gaze dropped onto his lap. He sees Oboro sit on the floor against his desk’s leg out of the corner of his eye, so he turns his head to look at him.

“That’s debatable,” Oboro retorts, not unkindly.

That’s fair actually, considering all the wrong answers, but... “the point’s to learn, not know it all.”

“I know, I know,” Oboro sighs, looking defeated. “I just... I don’t wanna see you struggling because you won’t accept any help. You’re learning your Quirk, I know you are, but you’re in class 1-A, man, you’ve gotta be the best of the best to keep up. I know you can, you’ve got power, and drive, but you can’t do it alone. And... and it sucks that I can’t help you.”

The defeat seems to overwhelm the ghost as he pauses, searching for what he wants to say next. Izuku wants to comfort him, but it’s not really the time nor the place, considering his whole class is spread around working on their tests, and Present Mic-Sensei is still upfront, “but Shota can help. He’s hard on you, but that’s because he’s under the impression you’ve had your Quirk since you were a kid. But you *haven’t*.”

Izuku bites at the skin on his bottom lip as he studies the ghost. There’s a metallic twinge in his mouth, which tells him he bit a little too hard, so he releases his lip and heaves a silent sigh. He hadn’t known Oboro was this worried about it.

“...you’re already at a disadvantage here. You’re making it harder on yourself, when you don’t *have* too. I’ve seen students burn out. I’ve seen them work themselves to the ground. One of my best friends did too...” the pause is reminiscent before his attention returns back abruptly, “I won’t let it happen to another friend. You’ll make a great hero, Izuku, you just... you’ve just gotta let people *help* you do that.”

He’s not sure what to say. How to respond. He feels guilty now. The churn of annoyance in his stomach from earlier swiftly melts into

something more bitter. Like a brick weighing heavily in his stomach.

He doesn't get the chance to offer a response, because he jolts when a hand lands softly on his shoulder blade. When he sits up, eyes flicking down to Oboro before he notices Present Mic-Sensei crouched beside him on the other side of the desk from Oboro.

"You doing alright, Lil' Listener?" The teacher's voice is soft as to not disturb those around him, "you've had your head down for a bit, anything I could help you with?"

He glances down again against his better judgement, seeing the pleading look on his friend's face. His face crumples when Izuku catches his eye, and it's only then Izuku realizes his eyes are filled with unshed tears. He'd always been a cryer.

"Uhm." Izuku's voice wobbles, but he clears his throat to steady it, "I... I guess I'm struggling a little? Just a bit... frustrated, I think."

He wipes away his tears before they fall, looking down at his paper again.

"That's alright," Present Mic smiles softly, hand squeezing his shoulder briefly before his palms flatten on the desk and he rises up a bit to let his gaze scan the paper, "we all get frustrated, yeah? I'll help you understand what you're struggling with, and then you can try again, sound good?"

"Sounds good," Izuku ducks his head in a thankful nod that doubles as a chance to catch the ghost's eyes under the table. His smile is small, but it's honest. Prideful, which in turn, makes Izuku's lips curl in a tiny smile.

It's not exactly what Oboro was looking for, but it's a step in the right direction. He's asking for help. He could've claimed to be okay, and Mic-Sensei would've nodded, and stood, leaving him to it. But he hadn't.

"Good," Present Mic grins, oblivious to the interaction between Izuku and his ghostly friend, "let's see here. Oh, yeah, I see what you're doing wrong with these. You're totally on the right track though, Lil' Listener, let's just~"

And if Izuku's foot freezes as the ghost's hand phases through his shoe in a knowing gesture, he can't find it in himself to care, attention on his paper, focus on his Sensei, and a small smile settling onto his lips

at the gesture.

It was Friday now—Izuku had survived the first two weeks of school.

After Wednesday's English class, Izuku had been thinking long and hard about asking for help. He's still scared. Of the thought, and asking in general. There's that inkling of fear when he thinks of asking the teacher who was going to expel him too, but it's slowly easing the more time he spends with his homeroom teacher.

Oboro hadn't eased up on attempting to persuade him into talking to his Sensei, but he had stepped back from injecting himself in Izuku's classwork. It was a compromise for the time being that Izuku didn't mind.

He knew his friend was trying to help—maybe not in the right way, but he understood. Oboro had made good points, and he had been right about Present Mic being a good guy. The voice hero had proved himself to be exactly what Oboro had insisted, seeing as after school that Wednesday Izuku had joined him for a bit of extra help with the English concepts they were learning, and he already felt more confident with them.

Overall, he'd been doing alright with his classes. He was good at the actual school work—he'd had top grades with Kacchan at their junior high, but even he knows he's already falling behind in his Hero courses.

And that won't do.

Aizawa-Sensei has already made it clear that he's not afraid to expel those who don't meet his expectations, and Izuku's terrified one of these days his teacher will just drop him. Oboro has told him that his Sensei sees potential in him, but he's still so scared.

They don't spend every day working with their Quirks. It's a one on, one off kinda thing, and Izuku's sure his teacher's giving them a bit of a break after the battle exercises. He appreciated the gesture while his burnt arm continues to heal. By the end of the first week, he'd been allowed to take the bandages off for it to breathe, but that didn't mean it didn't *look* bad.

He hadn't really gotten hurt again, not like that first exercise, at least. But, to be fair, he hadn't really had the opportunity to really injure himself. He hadn't been forced to use his Quirk like he had been in the

exercise with All Might.

Truthfully, they'd spent quite a bit of time in the classroom.

They'd selected a class president, Iida, and a vice president, Momo. Well, to be fair, Izuku had been elected first (and boy, had Oboro *laughed*, and that had just made Izuku flush brighter and stutter through his words). Thankfully, it was decided that Iida was more suited for the role.

But besides that, they worked on some paperwork, and assignments, like writing about their own Quirks; what they knew, negatives of their Quirks, their limits, and theories about what they could possibly accomplish when given actual Quirk training.

That's not to say they didn't do anything with their Quirks—they did, Aizawa-Sensei was still trying to gage what they could do, so they did some sparring in pairs (Izuku and Kacchan on either side of the room with their appointed partners), and other tasks where they could put their Quirks in the spotlight.

Izuku tried hard not to use One for All because he didn't want to hurt anyone, and he could see that Aizawa-Sensei had taken notice of his hesitance. His Sensei hadn't said anything, but he could feel the man's observing gaze on his back.

Izuku knew he was miles behind his peers. He was afraid to use his new Quirk. Afraid to do damage to someone else, or hurt himself too bad; to the point his teacher cuts him out. Oboro promises that Aizawa-Sensei would never do that, but Izuku's still hesitant.

Oboro had continued to press Izuku about telling Aizawa-Sensei about how recently he'd gotten the Quirk, promising it would make all the difference in the world.

He'd been putting it off. Slipping out of school before his ghost friend had the chance to pressure him into it. Oboro is wise to his tricks, but there's really not much a ghost can do.

Izuku's afraid, but he knows he has to. He either needs to give Aizawa-Sensei some information; let himself be helped, or he's going to fall behind and get the boot outta the class. There're thousands of kids who'd kill for a spot in class 1-A, so he'll be damned if he lets this slip between his fingers because of his own fear, or pride.

That said, he's still hesitant.

Even now, as he stands outside his homeroom classroom after school. He knows what he has to do—knows what's right, he just needs to... well, work up the courage.

Class had let out after a long afternoon of training. They'd been in the gym working individually; pushing their Quirks as hard as they could under their Sensei's orders. Aizawa-Sensei had observed them all from his spot, attention lulling from student to student, which included Izuku practicing turning One for All on and off.

He knows it's not impressing, but if he can't master that, what's the point?

His peers had all disappeared out the changing room doors and dispersed on their ways home, but Izuku had found himself slowly stepping towards their homeroom instead of out the main doors.

A part of him hopes that the longer he takes to get to the classroom, the better chance that Aizawa-Sensei would've left already and he could avoid this all together. He doesn't really want to let his teacher in, but he knows he has too. His peers are quickly pulling ahead of him, and if he doesn't change that, he'll be forever stuck at the bottom, even with One for All.

Then he really would be nothing more than a waste of a Quirk, like Aizawa-Sensei had said that first day.

He lingers outside the closed door, hand poised to knock. He's not sure why he can't force his knuckles down onto the door to alert Aizawa-Sensei (if he's even in there) that he's there.

His chest feels tight, and his hand trembles where it's hovering by the door. His throat feels thick, and dry, but when he swallows in an attempt to wet it, it makes his stomach churn uncomfortable.

When he finally works up the courage to knock, he squeezes his eyes shut, but before he can force himself to lower his knuckles, the hinges on the door wheeze as they're rolled open.

Izuku takes a surprised step back, arm dropping to his side like he's a child who's been caught doing something naughty, like stealing a cookie or something, as his eyes snap open. Aizawa-Sensei looks about as surprised as the man ever has, and it just fills Izuku with a sense of dread.

"S-sensei," Izuku forces out, hoping his voice didn't come out as a

squeak. It probably did, considering Aizawa-Sensei's eyebrows bunched together, and his lips curled down into a light frown.

“Midoriya,” he greets in reply, eyeing the student from head to toe, as if gaging if he needs to escort him to Recovery Girl. It’s a fair assumption considering the past first week, but Izuku feels his cheeks burning at the insinuation. “Was there something you needed, or do you hover outside all your classes after school?”

“I-I--” Izuku’s heart hammers against his chest, and he’s sure his blood pressure is through the roof. “I, uhm, I was wondering if I could.... If I could talk to you. Y-y'know, a-about my Quirk?”

Aizawa-Sensei for his part, waits patiently while Izuku mutters his way through the shaky request. When the teen has gone quiet, his eyes drop down to the arm that had been in a sling those first few days, but his gaze lifts before Izuku can self-consciously tuck his arm out of sight behind his back.

There’s a thoughtful second before his Sensei gives a faint nod, moving to step out of the room, only to pause cautiously, glancing behind him before catching Izuku’s gaze, “would you feel more comfortable in the classroom, or one of the conference rooms? I doubt anyone will come into the classroom, but the conference rooms are sound proof.”

“Conference room?” Izuku asks meekly, hunching in on himself.

He’s not even supposed to be telling anyone about One for All, but here he is. The least he can do is make sure no one else besides Aizawa-Sensei hears this.

There’s a nauseating mix of sinking guilt and hopefulness swirling around in his stomach. He hasn’t even said anything yet, but he still feels like he’s betraying All Might, but on the other hand, he can’t be the only (living) person who knows about this. He doesn’t want to carry this alone anyone, and have it wedge further between his own inching growth of being able to handle One for All, and how his peers are flourishing with their Quirks—thriving under Aizawa-Sensei's teachings.

He hadn’t even gotten the chance to run it by All Might, since the Pro had been busy with classes and using what little of his strength is there to parade around town as the Symbol of Peace.

His hands wring together in front of him as Aizawa-Sensei finally steps

out the door, shutting it behind himself. The teacher's gaze sweeps over Izuku and the empty hallway before he turns, "come with me."

Izuku falls into step behind his teacher, following blindly. He's never seen the conference rooms, but he's also not had reason too yet. Still, he's nervous. His knees feel weak as he struggles to keep up with his teacher's sluggish pace.

They don't say anything as Aizawa-Sensei leads him along—first into the teacher's lounge where Izuku hesitates for just a second outside the door, then into a room leading off the side of the room. There're three doorways spaced along the wall, and the teen's sure they're all sound proof conference rooms.

There are a few teachers in the lounge—Present Mic-Sensei, and the R-Rated Hero: Midnight. He thinks he sees Snipe and maybe Thirteen too, but he's still trying to keep his focus on not throwing up due to nerves, and keeping himself upright lest he fall over in front of all these Pro Hero teachers.

Aizawa-Sensei slides the door open, and gestures Izuku in before stepping in after and sliding the door shut again.

There are two couches on either side of the coffee table settled between them. Aizawa-Sensei slinks to one, and Izuku follows his lead and settles down on the one across from him, holding himself stiffly as his teacher all but collapses onto his.

The silence rings in Izuku's ears, and it takes far too long for him to realize that Aizawa-Sensei is letting Izuku guide the conversation entirely. He had asked to speak about his own Quirk, why would Aizawa-Sensei lead a meeting that Izuku requested?

The boy takes another moment to collect his thoughts, trying to organize what he's going to say without spilling too much. He'd had a problem with that recently—first with Kacchan, and then with Oboro. He wants his teacher to understand, but he doesn't want to completely destroy the trust he has with the Number One Hero.

"I'm... I'm not good at using my Quirk," Izuku decides to start out with, voice devoid of emotions. "It... well, as you've seen, it hurts my body. It's just... It's so powerful."

Aizawa-Sensei's gaze is focused on Izuku, but it's not prying. He's trying to understand, probably trying to figure out where the conversation is heading.

“Okay.” The man lets out lowly when Izuku can’t find anything else to add. “I know all this already, Midoriya. I’ve seen what your Quirk does to you, and I know it’s powerful just by what it does do to your body.”

The teen shuts his eyes, forcing out a slow breath that he hopes might calm his nerves a little (it doesn’t) as his hand tightens into a fist to the point his knuckles blanch to a pasty white. “There… there’s something about my Quirk that I should tell you…”

His teacher is silent across from him, letting him wade through the conversation however he can. Izuku silently wishes his teacher would have mercy on him and take the reins, but he’s starting to realize that’s not how Aizawa-Sensei rolls.

Izuku opens his eyes, but refuses to look up at his teacher, and instead locks his eyes on the fist he unclenches. “I know it doesn’t seem like I’ve been putting in much effort in our Hero training classes. Everyone else has been working really hard, and pushing themselves to the limits. They’ve been working so hard, and I see that and… and I’ve been trying too, but it’s… it’s different for me, Sensei.”

“Different how?” Izuku looks up to see his teacher’s eyes on him, alert and cautious. He must’ve seen that it’s different too. Had he been waiting for Izuku to make the first move?

There’s a lot that makes this different. One for All, or one. How he’d gotten his Quirk. How recently he’d gotten his Quirk. The power he’s unused too. It feels like he’s learning how to use One for All by taking one step forwards followed by three backwards. He’s afraid of all this power. He’s afraid he’ll never live up to All Might’s legacy with it.

“I’m afraid,” Izuku settles on, whispering the words out just above his own breath. He can feel his heart pounding in his chest at his quiet admission. It’s beating so hard he can hear the thumps in his own ears.

Aizawa-Sensei leans forwards, eyes narrowing in on him.

“You’re afraid.” The teacher repeats uncertainly. “Of?”

“My Quirk,” Izuku’s gaze is back down on his hand, fingers clenching in a fist before flattening out repeatedly. A repetition that almost calms him down. “I don’t know how to use it, Sensei. I’m afraid I’ll hurt someone, or… or myself worse than I already have. I’ve been trying to understand it, but… I don’t know how. I don’t get it.”

His Sensei is thoughtfully quiet, unwavering gaze on Izuku. When his gaze does move, it's just down to where Izuku is still tensing and relaxing his fist and his gaze only lingers for a second before his eyes lift back to his face. Izuku would give anything in this moment to know what his teacher was thinking.

"They didn't teach you how to control this in Quirk counselling? Quirk training? It's been a few years since I went to school, but I'm sure that's still something they do. Especially for someone with such a powerful Quirk."

The teen winces, wringing his hands together instead. He sucks in a breath, shaking his head, "I never went, Sensei."

"Never?" staggered confusion curls his tone. It's enough to have the boy looking up, surprised to see the blatant shock on his teacher's face. The emotion's gone as fast as it appeared, but Izuku's still reeling from seeing it. "You didn't do any... none?"

"No, Sensei," the boy whispers.

"Why didn't you go?" his teacher's voice is stern, the annoyance from the first day back. Izuku recoils slightly, he catches himself doing it, and forces himself to keep in place.

"It... it wasn't offered," the teen swallows hard, "n-not to me, Sensei. They... Quirkless kids don't need Quirk training or counselling. It was a waste of funds for someone like me to see the counsellor. So, they... I wasn't allowed."

"You're not Quirkless," his teacher retorts with an unamused look. Despite the expression, his words are suddenly uncertain. "Tell me you're joking, Midoriya."

"I'm not, Sensei," The teenager shakes his head, "I never got my Quirk growing up." He doesn't bother mentioning the fact he was diagnosed medically Quirkless at age four—he's not sure how he'd cover that up. The toe joint doesn't lie, right?

"When?" Aizawa-Sensei's voice is stern. Izuku jolts up in surprise at the hard tone. His eyes jerk to his teacher, but he can't read anything in his expression. It's hard, but not angry. There's no irritation, or annoyance, or anything he's used to seeing on the man's face. His lips are pressed into a thin line, and his eyes are boring into Izuku's own like he's searching for an answer.

When? He'd asked. But what did he mean? When what?

“S-Sensei—”

“When?” he repeats, voice unchanging, “when did you get your Quirk, Midoriya?”

The teenager hesitates, fiddling with his own fingers. Aizawa-Sensei doesn’t demand again, but he doesn’t offer anything else either. It’s clear this isn’t something Izuku can step around, his teacher is waiting for an answer—demanding one.

“Does it matter, Sensei?”

“It does,” the man levels a stern look. “Of course, it matters. When did your Quirk manifest, Midoriya?”

“The day of the Entrance Exam.”

His teacher sucks in a breath like Izuku had sucker punched him in the stomach. His eyes widen, but unlike Izuku when he’s surprise, his gaze doesn’t stray from Izuku’s face. Neither say anything for a second, Izuku’s so out of his depth, and Aizawa-Sensei looks shellshocked.

It takes a second for his teacher to finally move again. The shock drains from his face, and then he’s back to that expressionless boredom he has in class. If it weren’t for the glint of sudden understanding in the man’s eyes, Izuku would think the past conversation hadn’t even happened.

“So, let me get this straight,” the teacher’s tone is neutral. Izuku’s not sure whether to be terrified of the tone, or thankful it’s not blatant anger. “You got your Quirk on the morning of the Entrance Exam, used it for, I’m going to guess, the first time taking out the Zero-Pointer, which broke both your legs, and your arm. You then proceeded to change your Quirk status before school started, so the fact you were Quirkless before didn’t show up on your record unless someone *dug* for it, then showed up to my class after, what, two weeks of having your Quirk? No counselling. No coached training. *Nothing?*”

“N-no, Sensei,” Izuku wheezes out, suddenly feeling like this is a horrible idea. Why had he let Oboro talk him into this? Where the hell even was Oboro?

He’s expecting his teacher to stand up, expel him on the spot and

escort him out. He's expecting yelling. Anger—no, rage. He's expecting a lot of things, but what he's not expecting is for his teacher to all but melt back into the couch. He lets out a deep and heavy sigh, dragging a palm down his face before he sits up again and his tired eyes are back on Izuku.

"I knew there was something wrong. Right from the second you punched that robot, rendering yourself useless. You and that Quirk. I knew it. There was something off about you, Midoriya. I just didn't expect it was something like this. You've only had your Quirk for a month. Four weeks." His teacher clicks his tongue distastefully, "Frankly, Midoriya—" and here it comes—*you're expelled*— "I'm impressed."

Izuku jolts upright, gaze instantly captured by his teacher's grey eyes. He's not sure, but he thinks he might mumble a starstruck "w-what...?"

"I'm not happy, of course. I should've been made aware of this from day one for your safety, and your classmate's safety as well—it would've drastically changed my lesson plan for you, and I could've arranged proper counselling sessions for you as well. This course, my lessons, are geared towards students who already have a general handle on their capabilities, but I am impressed nonetheless. It's honestly surprising you've managed to keep up with my class as well as you have been, considering how recently you got your Quirk and how little practice you've had controlling it."

Impressed.

Aizawa-Sensei was impressed. Izuku had impressed his Sensei.

"That said," the man's tone changes, sterner, but calm at the same time. It almost matches the one from that first day, but it's also completely different; Izuku's not afraid anymore. "Not telling me, your homeroom and hero studies teacher, was reckless and illogical, Midoriya. I understand this is a sensitive situation, a Quirk coming in so late is rare, but you should've been put right into Quirk training and counselling—which you will be now. You've done well thus far, but there's a large margin for improvement."

Izuku nods, because that seems fair. He knows all this already. These were points Oboro had stressed as well. Plus, he'd seen all his elementary classmates after they'd first gotten their Quirks, and he'd seen how much counselling actually aided in development of said

Quirks.

“So, I won’t be expelled?” Izuku asks slowly after their conversation has faded off. He knows it’s not over quite yet, but he’s taken the chance to ask what had been on his mind.

“No,” Sensei huffs. “I saw potential in you, Midoriya. Potential in a Quirk that I thought you had the barest of control over, which I come to find out is completely true. You have a lot of work to do, you’ll need to catch up to your peers, but I do see potential.”

“I’m ready to do whatever it takes to become a Hero, Sensei.”

“I don’t doubt that,” the man shrugs, leaning back against the couch. “Now, about that training and counselling. I’ll personally be handling your Quirk training. Neither of us know what you’re capable of, so it’s best that I’m there to erase your Quirk if it gets out of hand, or I think you’re in danger. The counselling will be with HoundDog, who will be briefed on need-to-know information, which is just how recent you got your Quirk. He’ll also take some of that time to guide you in ordinary counselling, like I mentioned last week.”

“But I won’t get expelled?”

“No, Problem Child,” comes the sighed response, “you won’t get expelled. Not for this. Although this will change some aspects of class, don’t expect me to go easy on you. You’re training to be a Hero; I’m still going to treat you as such. I’m not going to treat you any differently than any of my other students—so if you’re slacking off, or wasting my time, you’ll be dealt with accordingly.”

“Thank you, Aizawa-Sensei,” Izuku can’t help but mumble gratefully. He bows his upper body and ducks his head down respectfully.

He really hadn’t wanted any special treatment to come out of this.

He just... he needed help.

He needed someone who knows Quirks—someone who has the time to help.

Izuku’s beyond thankful for all All Might’s been trying to do—he appreciates their quick check-ins and those passing moments where the Number One Hero would bestow nuggets of wisdom onto him. He knows Might’s been trying, but he’s already got an image to uphold, and fans, and his teaching and a whole lot of other responsibilities on

his plate. Izuku comes second to all that.

“Don’t thank me, Problem Child,” Sensei snorts, waving him off with a tired flap of his hand. “I expect great things from you, so don’t let me down, got it?”

“I won’t,” Izuku perks up confidently, “I promise, Sensei, I won’t let you down.”

Izuku thinks his eyes are playing tricks on him because if he’s not mistaken, that’s... that’s a smile on his Sensei’s face. It’s tiny, hardly even there, but he’s sure the corners of his lips have curled the slightest bit upwards. He’s never seen his Sensei smile before; he doesn’t even think his Sensei is the type to actually smile.

Overwhelmed by it, Izuku throws himself into another bow, feeling his eyes water traitorously, “thank you, Sensei. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, and listening to me.”

“Thanks for trusting me enough to tell me,” Sensei returns, and when Izuku looks up again, the smile is gone from his teacher’s face, “though I do wish you would’ve told me sooner. And I am curious what compelled you to tell me now though.”

“Ah,” Izuku rubs the back of his neck anxiously, lips twitching into a smile as he thinks to the persistent ghost who was going to be over the moon at his victory, “a friend convinced me, actually. He was very concerned when he found out, and was persistent that I tell someone —you specifically.”

“Oh?” the man cocks his head in interest. He looks like he wants to ask more questions, but instead he turns his head away from Izuku, bangs falling into his face, “your friend’s smart then. Why me specifically?”

For that one, all Izuku can do is shrug, because he really doesn’t know. Oboro hadn’t told him why, besides the fact that he was hellbent on convincing Izuku his Sensei was a good teacher and person. He doesn’t want to tell his Sensei that—especially when Aizawa-Sensei was clever and observant.

“I’m not sure, Sensei.”

Aizawa-Sensei's quiet for another moment, lost in thought. He looks towards Izuku, studies his face, before looking away again. He looks like he wants to ask questions. His expression is a mixture of

confusion and interest, but he doesn't ask anything.

"It's late," the teacher huffs out instead, standing up and stretching his back out in a way that resembles a cat. "I'm sure your mother must be wondering where you are, so you should head home now, Problem Child."

"R-right!" Izuku forces himself up, shuffling his feet nervously as he follows his Sensei to the door. He knows his mother isn't wondering where he is—he doubts she's even home. Still, he bows his head, "Thank you again, Aizawa-Sensei."

His teacher gives a grunt of acknowledgment before pushing the door open, finally glancing down at Izuku over his nose, "we'll sort out everything else on Monday. Either in the morning, or after school. Whichever you prefer, I'll be here."

"Okay." Another 'thank you' sits on the tip of his tongue, but he bites it back. His teacher is already giving him a look of annoyance. "I'll come earlier on Monday, if that's... if it's alright? H-have a good weekend, Sensei."

"Yeah," Aizawa-Sensei huffs out tiredly, "you too, Problem Child. Now, off you go. Shoo."

The teacher's lounge had cleared out—well, except for Present Mic-Sensei, and Oboro, who Izuku immediately finds sitting on the floor beside the door he'd just come out of.

"You know I don't wanna be that person, but..." His friend jerks upright, grinning knowingly as he pushes himself up to his feet, "I told you so."

"Uh huh," Izuku manages to drawl out under his breath, shooting the ghost an eyeroll even though he has a small, thankful smile on his lips too.

Izuku feels his teacher brush against him as he slips out the door, and it's just then that Izuku realizes he'd stopped in the doorway at spotting Oboro, "S-sorry, Sensei!"

His teacher flaps a tired hand at him, moving into the teacher's lounge where he grabs that yellow sleeping bag he always has in homeroom, but never when they're training. It had been hidden behind the couch.

Izuku suddenly feels out of place stood in the teacher's lounge. He

clears his throat, attracting both his teacher's attention, then flashes a nervous smile, "thank you once again, Sensei. And... and have a good weekend, Mic-Sensei. You too, Aizawa-Sensei, but I already told you that. Uhm."

Present Mic is grinning, and even Aizawa-Sensei doesn't appear annoyed anymore, which is a step up from usual. The two share a look before both their attentions fall onto him again.

"Thank you, Lil' Listener!" Mic-Sensei cheers brightly, "you have a good weekend as well! Eraser here kept you far too long, best get home now before your folks get worried, y'hear?"

"*Technically*," Sensei drawled before Izuku could respond, "he kept me far too long." The dark-haired teacher flicks Mic-Sensei on his leather jacket covered shoulder as he walks past with his sleeping bag in his hand. "I didn't force him here, he asked."

"Don't blame our innocent Lil' Student, Eraser. Midoriya's a dear."

"Problem Child."

"He's a dear!"

"*Problem. Child.*"

Izuku turned his head subtly to glance at Oboro, who was watching on with both annoyance and amusement on his face. He looked done with the two teachers, but he also looked greatly entertained.

"Thank you," Izuku smiles softly when the half-hearted bickering between the two dies down, as he moves towards the door now, Oboro on his heel, no doubt waiting to talk—and probably boast about being right again. "For the well wishes, Mic-Sensei. And I will, but I doubt my mother will be worried."

The two teachers share a look that Izuku doesn't notice as he turns the handle of the door. Oboro shoots a hopeful look at the two teachers, praying they'll hear the same disguised hint in the words that he does, even if Izuku hadn't intentionally meant to give anything away of his living situation.

He deflates when Shota opens his mouth though, "have a good night, Problem Child. Don't forget about Monday."

"I won't!" Izuku chirps, waving at the two with a smile. Hizashi

returns the wave with just as much enthusiasm, but Shota merely cocks an eyebrow as he steps into his sleeping bag. “Bye, Senseis!” then, the kid’s gone.

“You two are so unbelievably dense! I guess some things never really change,” Oboro sighs as he lingers, shooting his friends an exasperated look before stepping through the door, “hey! ‘zuku, wait up!”

There’s a moment of silence in the teachers' lounge as Shota pulls up his sleeping bag, zipping it up and pulling the hood up so he’s nothing more than a face and stray black hairs.

“I don’t like this, ‘zashi,” Shota breaks the silence, shaking his head as he collapses on the couch beside his husband.

“Don’t like what?” Hizashi looks down at him, leaning back against the couch for a bit of relaxation before leaving for the radio station. They always took the first little while after school to chill, before Hizashi would leave, and Shota would catch all the sleep he could until his patrol.

“There’s something different about that kid. I just... I can’t put my finger on *what*.” The man shook his head as he inched towards his husband. Hizashi’s hand settled on top of his sleeping bag covered head, just resting it there. “I don’t think he’s got the best homelife either, but that’s not what’s off about him, that’s just what I’ve noticed.”

“What makes ya say that?”

“His mother didn’t come in after the battle exercises. The kid broke his arm, had his other arm burnt to a crisp, and he lost consciousness. Chiyo couldn't even reach the kid’s mother. If it were my kid, I damn well would’ve shown up for him. He *walked* home with those injuries, ‘Zashi.”

“And he mentioned her not being worried just now,” Hizashi frowned. The voice hero chewed on his bottom lip, lost in his thoughts, “we can’t start prying into his life until we have reason too. Izuku shows up, he performs well in his classes, even if he is a little space-y at times, he’s friendly, and put together. There’s nothing to be overly concerned about yet; nothing that would prompt an emergency parent-teacher meeting, or a wellness check.”

“Doesn’t feel right,” the darker-haired snapped tiredly, letting his eyes slip shut.

“No,” Hizashi agreed, with a shake of his head, “but our hands are tied. None of the other teachers have brought it up. He hasn’t brought it up. We can’t overstep, even if I trust your gut feeling more than anything. I see what you mean, but we’ve got a unique perspective. You could just be projecting onto Midoriya—shush, *I* know you’re not, but Nedzu might think so. He knew you when we attended school here.”

Shota had opened his mouth the refute the ‘projecting’ statement, but it promptly snapped shut when Hizashi all but read his mind, quieting him before he could even speak. He grimaced, but didn’t saying anything, letting Hizashi finish his thoughts, “If we’re going to do anything, we’re going to do it on his terms. Keep an eye on him. I will too. And if—”

“When,” Shota scoffs, cutting his husband off with a more realistic word choice.

“Alright,” the blonde huffs fondly, “and *when* something comes up, we’ll intervene then. If someone had’ve started stepping on your toes back then, you would’ve recoiled instantly. Let’s not chase Midoriya away before we even have the chance to help him.”

“Okay, whatever,” Shota huffs, turning slightly in his sleeping bag. He’s not happy with the outcome, but he understands it. Hizashi is right—even down to the conjecture of how Shota knows he would’ve reacted had one of his own teachers pressed him about his homelife growing up. It was bad enough trying to keep Oboro and Hizashi quiet about it, he didn’t need a teacher sticking their nose in his business. “But at the first sign of trouble, I’ll be getting involved.”

“And you won’t be alone,” Hizashi snorted, patting his partner on the head. “You rest for patrol tonight, I’ve gotta head on over to the radio station to get ready for my show now. I’ll see you after your patrol tonight. Love ya, Shou.”

“Love you,” Shota grunts out, squeezing his eyes shut. He knows his cheeks flare at the soft exchange, and that’s only made worse by how Hizashi giggles at his misery. Shota forces his eyes open again to glare up at his shifting husband, “I hate you.”

“If that’s true, you’ve got a funny way of showin’ it, Sho,” the blonde grins, leaning over to peck him on the lips before standing up, “stay safe.”

“You too.”

And then he’s gone, leaving Shota to try and get some rest, even if it’s hard now that his thoughts are lingering on a certain student who he now has to defeatedly admit is his newest Problem Child.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again! Hopefully you liked the chapter! I'd like to thank you all for taking the time to read, and interact! I read every single comment, even if I don't reply! I'll try to answer any questions I get though!

Now, I'd like to give some credit to a comment who sparked a scene in this update! Thank you iidolomantis for the idea of Oboro threatening to supply Izuku with answers in class. I loved it when I saw it, and just had to include the idea! Hopefully I got it close to what you were picturing, even if I had to change it up a bit to fit the scene!

If you guys have anything you want to see in this, lemme know and I'll see if I can squeeze it in a chapter! I honestly love trying to include what you guys wanna see!

Thanks once again for reading, and for all the interaction this has been getting! I makes me so happy to know you guys are liking it as much as I am! As always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! See ya in the next update!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Hello! I'm back again! We have now reached the USJ part of this story and lemme tell ya, this chapter... I had a lot of fun with it. This chapter, one of these scenes below, was the first thing I envisioned when I thought of this fic, so I hope ya'll like it too!
>
> Now, as a warning, I believe there probably are some spoilers on Oboro? I haven't read the Vigilantes manga, but I did read the MHA Wiki page for him, so I'm not sure how much of this, if any is spoilers. I won't say anything more, but the warning stands! Also, this one's kinda angsty, but then again, so is the whole USJ arc. It won't follow the anime completely, but it is heavily referenced!
>
> Now, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monday morning Izuku arrived at school early like he's told his Sensei he was going to. Aizawa was already in their homeroom classroom sitting behind the desk when Izuku pushed the door open slowly. He wasn't as early as he'd been the day he'd come looking for Recovery Girl, but it was still a good forty-five minutes until classes would start.

He breathes a sigh of relief at seeing his teacher already waiting for him.

Turns out Aizawa-Sensei already had a general schedule plotted out.

"Monday and Friday mornings before school," the teacher regarded him with lidded eyes, "and Wednesday after school. I'm also willing to work with you on Saturday, or Sunday as well. The weekend training is optional, rest is important, but I'm willing to blur the line a little in hopes of catching you up with the rest of the class in a timely manner. It's illogical to let you flounder in class when we could put in a bit of extra effort to catch you up, but still, the decision is yours, Midoriya."

"I'd like to train on the weekend as well, Sensei. I don't like being so behind everyone else, they're all so powerful already and I can hardly active at my Quirk without injuring myself."

"Very well," Sensei gives a light nod, "I've set the dates, so you pick

whether you'd prefer Sunday or Saturday. Training will take place here at school, since it's the safest place for me to monitor you, and you're already familiar with the area."

"Y-yes, Sensei," Izuku gives a steady nod.

"We'll do no more than four training sessions per week, and I will not budge on that; I don't want you to burn out. Truthfully, this is already more training than I'm usually comfortable allowing, you'll already be doing training in class as well, but I've had students like you, and I know you idiots won't just not practice because you've been asked not too, so I'll feel better about it knowing I'm there to end the training should I see you overworking yourself, or practicing to the point it's dangerous."

That was fair. Truth be told, if he had somewhere he could practice without fear of harming someone, or something, or even himself, he would be. One for All was powerful, and the sooner he got a handle on it, the easier his life would be. But that meant trial and error, and there wasn't a space for either trial or error when it came to One for All.

If Aizawa-Sensei hadn't of offered these sessions, Izuku would've had to look for some condemned building, or secluded location where he could train. Maybe even Dagobah beach.

"Additionally," his Sensei continued after a moment's pause, "HoundDog has agreed to morning or after school counselling alternating your schedule with me. I suggested two sessions a week, but one minimum would suffice. Hero work is harrowing though, keep your mental health in mind, Midoriya."

"Of course," the teenager nodded so hard his curls fell into his eyes.

His Sensei eyed him for a second, before returning a calmer nod, "now, we don't usually allow sessions outside of school hours, but you are a special case. In that regard, HoundDog's schedule is relatively open for you to choose and pick when you want to spill your guts. Since this is a rare and sensitive situation, and he's a bit worried about you."

The teenager can't resist snorting a laugh at his teacher's choice of words. He sobers almost immediately, thumb and index finger coming up to cradle his chin thoughtfully. "So, I'm doing morning Quirk training with you on Monday and Friday, and afterschool training on Wednesday. Could I do Quirk counselling in the morning on Tuesday

and Thursday, or is it alternating meaning that if I work with you in the morning, I have the option to work with HoundDog afterschool on that same day?"

Izuku pauses, chews on the inside of his cheek before looking back at his teacher.

"Either or, but if that's what you want, I'm sure HoundDog wouldn't mind," Sensei shrugged, leaning back in his chair, "are you up for coming in early every day of the week besides Wednesday? Counselling would be roughly an hour-long session, and Quirk training at *least* an hour depending on your endurance and control. I don't want you spreading yourself too thin, Kid. It's only the third week of school."

"I won't," Izuku shakes his head, grinning widely, "I'm up early anyways, this will just give me something to do. And there's an earlier train in the morning I can swap too, so it all works out perfectly."

"Your mother won't mind all this extra training?"

"No," the boy forces a grin that he thinks may be a bit too... *forced* to be natural. His teacher scans his face, eyebrows furrowing, but doesn't question further. Izuku refuses to look away from his teacher's gaze, and instead lets his smile waver into something less forced, "she won't mind, Sensei. I promise."

"Alright," the man sighs out. "I'll run this by HoundDog, and introduce you to him tomorrow morning if everything goes to plan. We'll start our training Wednesday afterschool. Come find me tomorrow morning."

"Okay," Izuku grins, this time it's completely honest, "thank you again, Sensei. I hope I meet your expectations; I'll work hard to earn my place in class 1-A."

"I'm sure you will," his teacher drawls, but there's a fondness in the look he's trying to mask. He seems to catch it himself, clearing his throat and glancing away, "Problem Child."

Izuku's grin just widens in return.

"Now get lost. Find a friend or something, I've got stuff to do. We have a busy day today, so be prepared for that. Don't be late."

"Yes, Sensei," Izuku's smiling so hard his vision blurs as his eyes

squint. He wonders briefly how Oboro can handle the loss of vision every time he grins this widely. It is his trademark smile; he probably has practice.

The student leaves the room without another word, knowing he'll see his Sensei again in the next little while. He's excited for whatever activity is planned, a bounce in his step as he softly rolls the door shut behind him.

He can't wait!

Izuku's excited for rescue training. He's almost vibrating on the bus as they travel to wherever the training will be held. Aizawa-Sensei doesn't seem to mind them chattering, his eyes closed, but Izuku's almost positive he's not asleep.

The group takes the travel time, where there's nothing of importance to be doing, in stride, getting to know each other just a little more. Izuku doesn't really focus on what's being said around him—besides the fact that Kacchan is on the receiving end of teasing, and Izuku's being left alone. The imbalance of it makes Izuku's insides feel mushy and uncertain, but he's also thankful the sole attention isn't on him.

Oboro had tagged along, but was standing by Aizawa-Sensei instead of tucked in beside Izuku. He was sitting almost shoulder to shoulder with his classmates, after all. Oboro doesn't actively try to phase through living people, unless the living beings are Izuku, Aizawa-Sensei and probably most often, Present Mic.

Izuku has come to realize that when Oboro's not annoying him, he's probably annoying Present Mic-Sensei. He very rarely does anything more than stand beside Aizawa-Sensei though.

When they finally arrive, Aizawa-Sensei leads them off the bus, entirely giving up on keeping them organized as the pool outside and stare up in awe at the building. It's only then that Izuku's struck with awe at noticing Pro Hero: Thirteen waiting for them. He knows, rationally, he'd seen her in the teachers' lounge on Friday, but in his defense, he's been trying not to throw up.

Now he can be excited though—he's sure his face is lax with a dumb starstruck expression.

Oboro snickers behind him, and the thing that snaps him out of his awe is a finger phasing through his cheek. He jolts away from the

chill, momentary disgust on his face because Oboro's *finger* had been in his *mouth*, before subtly glaring daggers at the grinning ghost.

"'was afraid you'd start drooling, Izu," was Oboro's only response, shoulder arching in a playful shrug. The green-haired boy could only roll his eyes to convey his annoyance, attention landing back on Thirteen.

She'd been talking, he realizes—she and his classmates. And he's missed some of it. But at least no one had seemed to notice him being weird as he's playfully bullied by a dead Yuuei student, who also happens to be one of his closest friends now.

Thirteen leads them into the building, and Izuku's jaw gapes open in awe once again. It's so cool. He'd thought the gym at school was amazing, but this—this was incredible.

Around him, excited chatter fills the air, and Thirteen pridefully introduces all the terrain replicas enclosed in the building. And Kirishima's right, this place really *does* look like an amusement park! His excitement only seems to bubble up even more as he stands there listening; a ship wreck, a landslide—natural disasters! It's just all so *cool*!

This USJ might even be cooler than Universal Studios Japan!

Izuku barely even notices as Aizawa-Sensei steps to speak with Thirteen away from them. He looks around for All Might, who Sensei had told them would be teaching along today too—Izuku's under the impression that All Might is being kept on a light leash under supervision from his own Pro teacher peers after the battle training mishap.

He doesn't see the bulking man anywhere, but he's only sad about it for a second before he's once again reminded that he's going to be training *here* today! So awesome!

Izuku pays avid attention as Thirteen explains what they're doing. She talks of Aizawa-Sensei's Quirk Apprehension test, and even All Might's battle simulations. Izuku knows One for All could be deadly—he's still learning to not harm himself when using it, but after her pep talk, he's more fired up than ever.

He wants to help people.

He wants to rescue.

He'll work hard to learn his Quirk so he can be the hero he's desperate to become. So, he can use it for good like All Might has been for so long.

Around him, all his classmates seemed to be fueled up in similar ways. Thirteen has a way with words!

"Right," Aizawa-Sensei calls after Thirteen has finished her upbeat and motivating lecture. He'd stood silently off to the side and out of the way, letting the other Pro take charge. "Now that that's over--"

Aizawa-Sensei's jaw snaps shut as the lights around them flicker. Izuku whips around to face Oboro, who stares back like a deer caught in the headlights of a vehicle. Izuku's not even sure his ghost friend could so something like that—but he's got no other ideas of what could've gone wrong. Especially when the teachers share a glance of confusion.

"That's not me!" the ghost yelps, hands raised in surrender. And he's right, he'd been tucked away in the middle of the crowd of students. Nowhere near the light fixtures running along the dome of the building. Oboro doesn't have that kind of power—he can barely interact with the living world besides his chilling presence. Izuku's only ever seen him flicker the lamp in his bedroom once, and that had taken all his effort.

The fountain fizzles out too, the spurts of water stopping entirely as the excess drips down. It starts back up, water spitting everywhere before slowing again. A vicious cycle that Izuku can't tear his gaze off of it. Something's happening.

"Also not me," Oboro swallows thickly, weaving around students to stand at Izuku's side. The chill is welcome as Izuku chances a glance at him as the lights dim drastically. Thankfully the sun streams in from the dome windows above, or they'd be in pitch black.

There's a panicked murmur from the students filling the air, but Izuku's not sure he could open his mouth if he wanted to say anything. It's eerie and silent even with the mumbles.

"What the hell?" Izuku looks away from where he'd been doing a subconscious count of everyone to make sure they were all still here, gaze locking on Oboro's shocked one before following the ghost's own gaze.

The fountain... what even was that? It was swirls of black and purples. It looked pixelated, or perhaps like granules of sand. It swirled with

movement, churning from the edges inward. Izuku could do nothing more than stare at it from where they were tucked away by the entrance. There was a dry, bitter taste in his mouth, that he distantly realizes as fear.

Aizawa-Sensei seems to have noticed the fountain doing whatever it was it was doing as well. Izuku sees the man's sharp movements as he turns, the looks towards him as his body faces the fountain too. His attention snaps back to the swirling mess of purple and black as he expands like a fire spreading through a dry forest and then—a hand. There's a hand coming out of the center of whatever that thing is.

A portal, his mind supplies numbly. That's a portal. There's nothing else it could be.

Izuku's never seen a Quirk like that—never even heard of something like that existing. He's struck with a new sense of fear as he looks towards his teacher for guidance.

"Stay together, and don't move!" Sensei barks out. It's unlike anything Izuku's heard from him thus far. It's an order. A serious order. He's scared. That's fear souring his tone. "Thirteen, protect the students!"

Thirteen corrals them all together jumping into action at the urgency in Sensei's voice. The students are herded together easily enough, shock and fear making them pliable. It's only their third week of school, and no one's heard Aizawa-Sensei sound like that before.

"W-woah, what is that thing?" Kirishima's voice breaks Izuku from his thoughts, and his eyes dart back to what had once been the fountain, which is now a solid sheet of menacing black and purple portal.

There's a figure stepping out, too far for Izuku to make out any details. And following him is a lot of others. Figure after figure steps through the portal, making Izuku's skin prickle with uncertainty. The students crowd together at the edge of the entry platform, gazes locked on the commotion.

"Wait, has training started already?" Kirishima's speaking once again, confusion in his voice. Izuku doesn't look at him this time, just keeps his eyes on the people spewing in from the portal. "I thought we were rescuing people?"

Izuku takes a step forward, intending to get a better look. Oboro's pressed so close into him, he's sure their shoulders are overlapping. It's so cold his shoulder has almost gone numb, but the cold is keeping

him alert.

“Stay back!” Sensei snaps, throwing them a vicious glare that’s more fear than anything else. Still, the students freeze like the words had been a Quirk of some sort. The man lifts his goggles onto his face, and looks back towards the portal. His gaze doesn’t waver from the fight when he continues, voice forcing the severity of the situation onto them. “This is real. Those are villains.”

Izuku knows there’s talking going on around him, but he’s more focused on the fact that the portal just morphed into a person. Sensei is speaking, but Izuku can’t register any of the words. Beside him, Oboro had frozen in place, eyes watching the group of villains and jaw agape. His eyes look troubled, and his body wobbles like he’s having a hard time staying upright.

Izuku wants to ask if he’s okay—he doubts anyone will notice him talking to thin air with all the commotion going on, but when he tried, his mouth feels like cotton. No one’s okay, the teen realizes with a start. None of them are, so he shouldn’t expect Oboro to be.

“Where is he?” A raspy voice calls, “I went through the trouble of bringing so many friends who’re here to meet him. They want All Might, the great Symbol of Peace. I can’t believe he’s not here...”

Izuku’s attention snaps to a man at the center of the masses. He’d been the first one through—the boss, perhaps? There’s a creature like thing behind him, and the Void-portal making villain as well.

“Maybe if I kill a few kids he’ll come out to play...” the raspy voice sneers indifferently.

Thirteen had put herself between them. Aizawa-Sensei and the villains on one side, and the herd of frighten Hero Course students on the other. Izuku watches as Aizawa-Sensei’s scarf strikes off his shoulders, hovering threateningly around him in coils.

Izuku listens silently as his peers and Thirteen talk. The alarms aren’t going off, and the teachers don’t know why. It’s an organized attack—and they’re left in the dark about whether they’re the targets, or if the whole school is under attack.

Izuku listens halfheartedly to as Todoroki talks about the villains—how they’re getting in, and how they’d managed to cut the lights and communications. Using the media as a distraction was clever, but incredibly stupid all the same. The icy-hot student had been right

about that. They really must have a plan if they're taking the chance to attack a school filled with Heroes in training and dozens of Pros.

"Thirteen, get them out of here. And alert the main campus." Sensei tells the other Pro fiercely, and anyone would be stupid to refute Aizawa-Sensei's chilling tone. "...Actually, if they've got the ability to block our sensors, then they might be jamming out regular communications too..."

Sensei's quiet for just a second before he's addressing Kaminari. "Kaminari, try using your Quirk to contact the school."

"Yessir," Kaminari ducks his head in a nod, instantly doing as their Sensei asked.

"No... Oh no," Izuku looks back towards the ghost, noting the loss of chilling presence on his shoulder. Oboro's hands are gripping his hair, pulling nervously. His bottom lip is caught between his teeth, and his face is so pale had he not been a ghost, Izuku was sure he'd have passed out already. Oboro's panicking instantly sets Izuku on edge. "He's going to fight," the ghost wheezes out, "Sho's going to fight them. All of them. Alone. God, he's... he can't—there's too many, he'll, he'll—"

Izuku whips his attention to where his teacher looks seconds away from launching into battle. He sucks in a stuttered breath, Oh God, Oboro was right—he really was going to— "What are you going to do, Sensei?" Izuku begs, for Oboro's and his own's sake, "you can't fight them on your own!"

There are dozens of villains. Dozens. *At least.* Eraserhead is good, but no one's that good. Not even All Might could do it, he's not even sure All Might in his prime could take on all these villains alone. There're too many for one Hero—one *person* to handle.

Sensei looks over at him, glaring over his nose, but Izuku pushes on, "there's too many of them! Even if you can nullify their Quirks, your fighting style's not suited for this!" Izuku's shoulders shake, and he's not sure whether it's nerves, fear, or Oboro hovering over his shoulder. "Your power works best in stealth and one-on-one fights. It's not gonna help with a group..."

His teacher regards him carefully behind his goggles. Really, he doesn't do more than angle his head in Izuku's direction, but the teen can feel his teacher's prying eyes on him, even hidden behind the yellow goggles.

Izuku knows he probably knows far too much about his teacher's fighting style, especially since he's an underground Hero who relies on the element of surprise, but to be fair he knows a lot about ever Pro he's ever gotten a glimpse at. There's honestly a good few pages on Eraserhead that he'd had before knowing the man, and even after studying him up close in his Analysis Journals, so he *knows*. He knows this is a losing fight. It's a losing fight to any hero, but someone who relies on stealth and close contact? Worse odds.

"You can't be a Pro if you only have one trick."

Izuku's gaze snaps up to his teacher's face as the words sink in. He can do nothing more than stare as his Sensei turns away again, glancing towards the other Pro briefly before continuing, "I'll leave it to you, Thirteen."

And then he's gone. He jumps down the stairs that lead to the platform where they're stranded, slowly being cornered in my criminals and villains. Right now, they're nothing more than sitting ducks. And their only defense is Aizawa-Sensei and Thirteen.

Aizawa-Sensei is at a small trio of villains before Izuku can even blink. He's quick. Quick and agile like an alley cat. He's almost too quick to keep his gaze on, and Izuku might've even lost him had it not been with his capture weapon flying around him.

If it were any other situation, Izuku would be frothing at the mouth. This so cool— he'd never seen Eraserhead really fight. The dull, grainy CCTV videos he'd managed to dig up on YouTube didn't do how cool Eraserhead really was any justice. The trio of villains are easily captured in the coils of scarf, Quirks all wiped away by Aizawa-Sensei's own. Izuku can only gape as his teacher effortlessly takes all three out by slamming them into one another.

He doesn't stop there, instead moving onto the next round of villains stalking in on him.

"I can't let him go alone," Oboro's voice sounds wrecked. It's hoarse, and scared. He's afraid. "I can't, Izu, I can't leave him alone like that. I... I gotta be there. I can't just... what if he...?"

When Izuku turns back to the ghost, he looks torn. Like he wants to keep an eye on the students, but desperately wants to tag along with Aizawa-Sensei too. The teen already knows the ghost has an attachment to his teacher, so he's not surprised by it.

He's glad that someone's going with his Sensei—even if it's just a ghost who Sensei doesn't know is there. Izuku doesn't even really know if Sensei actually knows Oboro, but either way, he could use a guardian angel standing over his shoulder.

"Go," he tells him under his breath, "we'll be okay... Aizawa-Sensei shouldn't be alone down there. We have each other, you... you go to him."

The brief glance of thankful relief is short lived as Oboro gives a serious nod. He blinks out of existence, and for a second, Izuku panics before he spots the head of pale blue hair down with his Sensei. The ghost is doing nothing more than running through villains in close proximity to Aizawa-Sensei, momentary jolts and shivers distracting the villains enough to actually aid Aizawa-Sensei.

Maybe he's not as outnumbered as Izuku thought? Not with Oboro on his side. The odds certainly aren't fair, but they're not entirely hopeless either.

Izuku stands watching, feeling useless as they fight down below. He wonders how long Oboro will manage to keep going. Oboro can only interact with the human world for so long before he loses his energy. It takes less to interact with a human by means of passing through them than it does to play around with lights, or grab a physical object, but he gets tired. It wears him down all the same, just slower. And he's mentioned that it's not a particularly pleasant feeling to phase through someone.

"This is no time to be analyzing!" Izuku's pulled from his thoughts by Iida's urgent voice. When he glances back, his classmates are all running towards the doors with Thirteen. He hadn't even noticed them moving. "We have to go!"

With one last look at his Sensei and friend working as an unlikely team only one of them is aware of, the green-haired teen turns on his heels and follows behind Iida.

They don't get far when the void-portal villain appears in their path, "there's no escape."

The voice is menacing. Deeper than the voice of the person who'd stepped through the portal first. Slowly, the villain loses his human form, void expanding outwards and upwards threateningly.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," the void greets calmly. It's terrifying.

He's terrifying. "We're the League of Villains. I know it's impolite, but we decided to invite ourselves into this haven of justice to say hello. And besides, isn't this a fitting place for All Might, Symbol of Peace, to take his last breath?"

Izuku feels his blood run cold at the words. All Might. They're really here for All Might. The teen can only assume that the Number One Hero isn't here because he'd already worked himself to exhaustion. He couldn't keep up the All Might form long, and certainly not without rests in between.

What would've happened if he'd been here too?

"I believe he was supposed to be here today," the villain continues, indifference in his tone. He sounds bored, not annoyed or anything. It's... an odd tone. Still, at the mention of the Number One Hero, Izuku and his classmates straighten up, geared for a fight. These villains know too much. They know All Might was supposed to be teaching with Sensei and Thirteen today. "And yet... I see no sign of him. There must've been some sort of change in plans we could not have foreseen..."

The students don't move a muscle as the void speaks. Thirteen keeps herself between them, equally as frozen. There's not a lot for them to do, not when face against someone so powerful. Not on their third week of classes.

"Ah, well, in the end I suppose it doesn't matter. I still have a role to play."

The portal stretches up further, the top of his head flickering like a purple flame as it stretches.

Izuku can barely see Thirteen's slow movements out of the corner of his eye. He doesn't want to blatantly look in fear the villain will see her moving too, but he also can't not watch what's happening. Thirteen fiddles subtly with the finger tips on her costume until a flap opens with a barely audible 'click'.

She has a plan. Thank God—

A growl sounds before Thirteen can do as she planned—she'd barely managed to lift her finger, ready to activate her Quirk. And it's a growl Izuku knows incredibly well. Kacchan. That was Kacchan. Oh no.

The freckled teen's attention jerks up in time to see both Kacchan and Kirishima launching at the portal-void villain. It's heroic, but oh God is it stupid.

A familiar explosion echos over the area, the air pooling with thick smoke. Izuku can't see either of them—he can barely see the classmates a step or so in front of him.

He can hear Kirishima's voice, cocky in a way it really shouldn't be given the situation. He hears his classmate's voice, but his attention is elsewhere. The portal granules waver through the smoke, drawing Izuku's eyes to it. It's slowly regrouping, collecting like it hadn't just been hit with Kacchan at full force, and Izuku knows Kacchan's full force attack is no walk in the park.

It doesn't look damaged in the slightest. No injuries. No pain. His voice doesn't even change.

"You live up to your school's reputation," the dark voice calls through the clouds of smoke. The void-like portals wave angrily around the man, and it's the only tell that this villain is annoyed. "But you should be more careful, Children."

The beady yellow eyes on whatever this thing is narrow in annoyance on them. His voice turns hard, tipping from the neutral it has been to a deep, contained anger, "otherwise, someone might get hurt."

"You two!" Thirteen's finger is still arched to use her Quirk. "Get out of the way right now!"

That seems to just anger the villain more, "I'll scatter you across this facility to meet my comrades and your deaths!"

The void-like portal shoots out around them, enveloping around them before creeping in and rushing them like a sandstorm. The control this villain harnesses would be astounding if it weren't for the fact that suddenly the only thing Izuku can see is pockets of purple in a black emptiness. He feels weird as it hits him; his stomach churns and a wave of dizzying lightheadedness has him arching forwards and protecting his face from stray granules of whatever Quirk this guy has with his arms.

There are shouts of surprise, and screams of terror from his classmates as the void-portal engulfs them. He wants to call out the them, but before he can, he's falling. His face is assaulted, and when he manages to pry his eyes open, he's plummeting into a large body of water—the

ship-wreck simulation zone, his mind supplies unhelpfully.

He'd been warped. It was a warping Quirk.

Thankfully he's not alone. He's not sure what he would've done if it hadn't been for Tsuyu in that water. And... Well, Mineta's there too.

By the time Izuku reaches the edge of the water with Tsuyu and Mineta, his fingers had thankfully gone numb. The adrenaline from launching himself into the water with a half-thought plan had been steadily declining, but thankfully, there was enough general adrenaline to keep his attention off his shattered fingers and on the prize—which just so happened to be Aizawa-Sensei and Oboro.

He's glad Mineta and Tsuyu came along with him to check in, but he knows he would've gone alone too. He's beyond glad to see them both standing still—exhausted and harrowed. Oboro looks seconds away from collapsing, and there's a translucentness to him that Izuku's never seen before. There's no doubt in Izuku's mind that the ghost had given it his all—gone Plus Ultra.

Similarly, Aizawa-Sensei's breaths are haggard. He's still standing. He's still fighting. His scarf flies wildly against the villains, trapping and taking them out one at a time when they get too close, or test their luck against him. He's tired, Izuku can see it in the way his body subconsciously slouches whenever there's a second or so without a villain stepping forward to try and take him out. He bounces right back into the fight easily, but he's definitely wearing out.

They watch for a second, hidden away behind the little ledge separating the water from the pavement where Aizawa-Sensei is fighting.

Izuku sees the man with hands covering his arms, sides, back, head and face charging for their teacher, and a small part of him wants to shout a warning at Aizawa-Sensei, but the man is too good at being a Pro. He whips around to the hand covered man, scarf flicking out in attempts to capture him.

They're talking, Izuku can see lips moving. Almost hear voices, but he can't make anything out.

He watches as the villain grabs fistfuls of Aizawa-Sensei's scarf, predicting his attacks. Izuku's heart hammers in his chest as he watches the villain get too close—Oboro is forcing himself into action,

charging at the villain when his hand settles on his teacher's elbow.

"Shit!" The ghost gasps, freezing at Aizawa-Sensei's side like he doesn't know what to do—how to help. "Oh shit, no, that's not good. Sho, that's not good! Get away! Get off him!"

Izuku can't see what's been done to Aizawa-Sensei, but he knows it's nothing good.

The ghost lets out a growl of anger as he dives through the villain still holding their Sensei in place... but there's no effect on him. He doesn't shiver, or shake, or anything. The only one who ends up trembling is Oboro. He wobbles on his feet, seeming to barely manage keeping himself up. The ghost lets out a cry of frustration, and... wait, is Oboro crying?

"Shit!" The ghost screams, and Izuku's not sure whether its agony, or fear, or just sheer frustration at his lack of usefulness in helping Aizawa-Sensei. The ghost forces himself up straight, though Izuku can see his body shaking, hands dragging down his face stressfully. "Shit, shit, shit! No, this isn't happening. It's not ending like this!"

Almost as if Sensei heard the ghost's calls, he manages to pry away from the villain and jump away gracefully, now clutching at his clearly injured elbow. His costume sleeve had been ripped away, leaving his elbow exposed. It's red, and broken; almost looking like shattered shards of class, but it's not bleeding. It's the work of a Quirk, but not a Quirk Izuku's ever seen before.

He's still managing to dodge everything, even as his arm dangles uselessly at his side. More villains had appeared, all circling around him. Oboro inches back, stood shoulder to shoulder with Aizawa-Sensei. He sucks in unsteady breaths, they both do, but they're still going.

The villain is talking, it sounds distant to Izuku's ears—almost like he's speaking softly so only Sensei can hear him. He wonders what's being said, but if the look on Oboro's face is anything to go off, it's not pleasant.

Even injured his Sensei continues to fight. He doesn't back down. Villains close in on him, but he just keeps going, flinging his capture weapon with his good hand, and using his agile close contact attacks with his legs. He's starting to get sloppy, but who wouldn't? He's been at this for however long, and he's just taken serious damage to his elbow, making his arm virtually useless.

“Look at you!” The villain covered in hands says, excited in a dull, uninterested kind of way, voice just loud enough that Izuku can hear it too. “You’re still standing! You really are so cool!”

There’s a pause, Oboro taking sloppy steps to stand beside Aizawa-Sensei.

“Oh, and by the way, Hero,” the villain teases. Oboro jolts at Aizawa-Sensei's side, whirling around to face the huge, *towering* creature that had swiftly settled behind them unnoticed. Izuku gasps at the same time Oboro takes a shocked step back, finally losing his balance and falling onto his arse. “I am not the final boss.”

Izuku can’t tear his attention away as the creature’s bulky hand rises, catching on Aizawa-Sensei's head. He can’t tear his attention away, but the only thing he hears is Oboro’s hoarse screams as he scrambles to his feet, launching another futile attempt at stalling the enemy.

The screams turn to cries as the creature grabs Aizawa-Sensei's head, squeezing as if it were nothing more than a stress ball. It’s almost effortless, that creature’s strength is unmatched by anyone there right now. The sheer force of it has Aizawa-Sensei's goggles cracking—flying off his head in pieces, blood dripping from it.

Oboro screams out again. Cries. Crawls towards Aizawa-Sensei. Oh God. Sensei...

The creature slams his teacher around as if he weighs nothing more than a ragdoll, smashing his head against the ground repeatedly, all the while Oboro tries desperately to help. Clawing, kicking, slapping, all of which phase right through the creature. The attempts are futile, nothing deters the creature in the slightest.

Izuku feels like he can’t breathe...

The three of them, students who have only been training for two weeks, can do nothing more than watch as their Sensei is tortured before their eyes. They’re frozen in fear, if these guys took out Aizawa-Sensei so easily, then three uneducated students have no shot at winning.

It would be walking into their own graves. Even with One for All.

Izuku recoils with a wince as the creature snaps Sensei’s arm like a twig. He’s not sure if Aizawa’s yells of pain are worse, or Oboro’s screams of desperation are. They both make his stomach churn.

The creature is holding Sensei down, sitting on him to keep him down while his hands work at breaking their teacher's bones. The villain covered in hands watches from a distance, and he's talking. Izuku can't hear what he's saying over his own pounding heart, but he's watching Oboro's expression grow angrier and angrier. His lip curls, body vibrating with something different than overexertion as his hands clench into trembling fists at his sides.

"No, no," Mineta whimpers at Izuku's side, but he barley even hears that, "I can't watch this anymore... We should be getting out of here super-fast, shouldn't we...?"

Izuku knows that's what they should do. They should leave. Aizawa-Sensei would want them to go, he wanted them safe—wouldn't have sent them away with Thirteen if he hadn't. Oboro had wanted him to go with his class. He couldn't control One for All, he's no help to anyone if he hurts himself to the point he's sitting prey to the villains.

But it feels so wrong.

Aizawa-Sensei had been trying to help him since that first day. They're conversation from just that morning, how attentive and uncharacteristically soft as they talked about additional Quirk training and counselling. It wasn't right to leave now—to leave his teacher in that state. Without hope.

But he just can't force himself to move. Not to help, or not to leave. He's just... frozen.

Izuku watches with wide, unblinking eyes as the warping villain returns at the hand villain's side. He can't see either of their mouths, but he's almost sure they're talking. The creature doesn't move off of Aizawa-Sensei, hand still forcing his teacher's face into the cracked ground below.

He's not moving—Sensei hasn't so much as twitched. Izuku thinks the worst for a second, only to remember that if Aizawa-Sensei was dead, Oboro would probably not be as unexpressive as he is. He should only panic when Oboro panics... right?

"Izuku!" the green-haired boy jerks his attention up at the desperate call of his name. He must've been lost in his thoughts because when he tries to glance at Oboro, who'd called him, his gaze instead snaps to the hand villain who's launching at them, fingers spread and ready to grasp. "Damnit! Watch out!"

He's heading right for Tsuyu, he's so close to her. Izuku can vision his friend crumbling to dust like Aizawa-Sensei's elbow had. He's still locked frozen in fear. He tries to prompt his muscles on—to unlock his knees and joints, but nothing works. All he can do is follow the villain's hand as his fingers touch onto Tsuyu's face and—

Nothing.

"Oh, thank God," Izuku hears, the voice sounding far away and almost foreign despite Oboro's voice being so close now, like he'd sprinted behind the villain when he caught on to what he was planning. Izuku wants to look over at the ghost, but is unable to turn away from Tsuyu and the villain. "That was too close," the ghost wheezes out.

The villain seems surprised for just a second, before he's turning to look back at Aizawa-Sensei. And it's just then Izuku connects the dots that Aizawa-Sensei had cancelled out the villain's Quirk before he could touch Tsuyu. "You really are so cool," the hand-covered man tuts, "Eraserhead."

"Damn right he is!" Oboro snarls, shooting a pained look back at where Aizawa-Sensei is barely managing to keep himself conscious, eyelid flickering in exhaustion and pain, but remaining open like his life depends on it—well, maybe not his life, but someone's life.

Izuku winces as the creature slams Sensei's head down again, cutting off his eye contact and no doubt forcing his eyes shut again.

He takes that moment of opening to launch into a punch. There's not going to be a better opportunity, he's not going to get many openings. He needs to do something. He can't just watch anymore. Not while his classmates are facing death, and his Sensei is smooshed into the ground like a wad of chewing gum.

He's prepared to break himself if it means rescuing those around him. He'll gladly take the lose if it means everyone else wins. No one's dying. It's not happening. He won't let it happen.

Izuku's beyond surprised when he lands his punch, but his arm doesn't shatter. There's no pain, nothing. Maybe what little practice he'd had in training had actually helped? But then the smoke of the punch clears and he takes a stuttered breath when he realizes he'd punched the creature, not the villain.

And it did nothing to him. Izuku's attack on the creature was just as futile as Oboro's and it didn't make *sense*. How? How had it done

nothing? He knows it worked—he had used One for All. He'd felt it in his veins; had seen how the force of it whipped any villains in the vicinity away, rippled the water around him and distantly shattered any lights close to him. But there was no damage on the creature.

"You're pretty powerful," the villain calls from behind the creature. "This smash of yours... are you one of All Might's disciples...? Doesn't matter. I'm done with you now."

The creature's eyes had been angled to the side, like he was trying to glance at the villain behind him, but when the words left the hand-villain's mouth, its eyes flickered back to Izuku.

The creature grabbed him before he could move, fist tightening around Izuku's arm like a vice.

"Izuku!" Oboro shrieked in panic. He'd paused at the edge of the water when Sensei had erased the villain's Quirk, but now he was throwing himself into the water with urgency, the currents not moving at all with his steps. "No!"

All Izuku could see was the creature's second hand coming towards him. Out of the corner of his eye he can see the villains hand aiming for both Tsuyu and Mineta. It feels like time had slowed down, he could do nothing by cower as the hand pushed closer. Oboro was still calling out to him, pleading, and begging.

Izuku forced his eyes shut when the hand was just inches away from his face. He didn't want to see it when it finally came. The same fate as Aizawa-Sensei.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, gripping hard—desperately. He wondered briefly who'd gotten to him, who would see his demise from just behind him—

"What the hell is this?" Izuku forced his eyes open at the call. The villain's voice was curled with frustrated confusion. The teen gaped as his eyes located the source of the confusion. Smoke. Where had all this smoke come from? It pooled in around them like it had suddenly appeared, and before Izuku knows it, he can't see anything through it.

Wait, that's not smoke. It's white and almost fluffy—filling in around them quickly and separating everyone. It's thick, but not suffocating. He can breathe just fine despite being encased in this. What... what was this?

“Which one of these brats has a Quirk like this?” the villain snapped in annoyance. “Nomu! Kurogiri! Where are you two?!”

The creature, Nomu, Izuku thinks, had paused in confusion. The teenager can’t see its hand coming at him anymore—can't even see its bulking body, but he’s still gripping his arm like a vice. Izuku takes its moment of confusion to tear his arm away, activating One for All just enough so he can break the grip it has on him. The fingers clutching his forearm give away in surprise, and a jolt of pain climbs up his arm, but he doesn’t have time to dwell on it because he’s suddenly being tugged backwards. He’s pulled away from the creature away, stumbling over his own feet.

There’s still a grip on his shoulder, but now there’s a second grip on his wrist, tight, but protective instead of threatening. The hand on his wrist leads him away, but the hand on his shoulder doesn’t falter—just squeezes tighter.

Izuku still has no idea what’s going on—what had just happened. One second he’s looking death in the eye, and the next he’s enveloped in a fluffy cloud-like—well, he’s not even sure what this is.

“W-what?” the teen breaths out, the hand not being gripped reaching out to wave through the strange texture surrounding them. It’s just then he realizes someone’s grabbing him. He’s being clutched. Whoever’s behind him lets out a stuttered breath.

Izuku whips his head around to look at whoever’s holding onto him, ready to throw down with some villain, but the fight promptly drains out of him when his eyes catch Oboro’s own wide eyes. “O-Oboro?” Izuku gasps in surprise, “w-what—I mean, why—how...? What is this?”

“I don’t know,” the ghost whines out, “I don’t know. I don’t know what’s happening! I can, I mean, I feel you. I’m touching you. But I’m not supposed to... This... this is, I haven’t—”

“Oboro what is this?"

“My Quirk,” the ghost croaks out, grip tightening on Izuku, “Cloud. It’s my Quirk. But I don’t... how is this happening? I’m... I mean, I can’t be... I *panicked*, Izu, but this isn’t... it’s impossible!”

This was... this is Oboro’s Quirk? Oboro, the ghost who he’d managed to befriend, had just used his Quirk in the real world? The living world? Izuku could see it. The villains could see it. This truly wasn’t

possible.

“My friends,” Izuku gasps out, brushing aside the fact that this smoke, these *clouds*, came from Oboro. He could analyze that later, but for now, he needs to make sure his classmates and teacher are okay, “they were in trouble, and, and Sensei, God, what about Sensei?”

“They’re safe,” Oboro bows his head, before he’s angling his chin upwards. He doesn’t look like he wants to take his hands away to point upwards yet now that they’re solid against Izuku, “your friends. They’re up there.”

Izuku angles his head up where he sees two sturdy clouds supporting both Mineta and Tsuyu. Mineta is cowering, but Tsuyu’s face is peeking over the edge of the cloud. He can hardly see them, but he’s sure they can’t see him through the dense clouds. He can only gape up at them for a second before he realizes they’re also on a cloud. Izuku throws his spare hand back, suddenly feeling unsteady. It slaps against Oboro’s hip and they both jolt in surprise.

“How are we...”

“I don’t know.”

“Okay...” Izuku blows out a steadying breath, “okay, and Sensei?”

Oboro bites his lip, “less okay, and in need of some serious medical attention, but he’s hidden. There’s a thick cloud surrounding him, and it’ll only part for your classmates, or the Pro teachers. Even if the villains try to get to him, they’ll barely be able to see their hand in front of their own faces.”

“Wow, okay,” Izuku forces another breath, because he’s sure he keeps forgetting to breathe. “You make clouds.”

“I make clouds,” the ghost snorts in agreement.

“That’s pretty cool.” Izuku eyes his friend without moving away, or pulling back at all. Oboro doesn’t feel cold, nor does he feel warm. He feels solid though, and it’s... well, it’s nice. It’s nice to be able to touch him for once, even if he’s got no idea what’s going on, or why it’s happening. “You’re not wearing your Yuuei uniform.”

“Huh?” Oboro looks down at himself, surprised to see the clothes he’s wearing. They’re blue, like martial arts robes. Atop of that, is a brown bomber flight jacket with a fuzzy collar. He’s wearing an aviator hat,

but still has his fluffy cloud-like hair showing, and he's got goggles like Aizawa-Sensei's, just instead of yellow, they're grey with yellow indentations. "I... haven't seen this in so long," the boy whispers in awe, "it's my hero costume..."

Izuku cocks an eyebrow in surprise, studying the costume closer. He'd only ever seen Oboro in the same Yuuei uniform. It's both incredibly strange, yet endearing at the same time to see him in something else. "Suits you," the green-haired boy shrugs with a smile.

"Thanks, Izu," Oboro snorts a laugh, "wish I could say the same to you, but I don't dig the All Might inspired ears on your bunny costume. Green is your colour though."

"Hey!" Izuku tries to be offended, but ends up laughing. "How do you know they're All Might inspired?"

"How do people *not* know?" Oboro fires back with a grin.

"Alright, I yield," Izuku shakes his head, having no further argument. "So, uh, how do we get Mineta and Tsuyu down? And, uhm, how do we get down?"

"Good question," Oboro bites his lip, "we could drop the purple one to the floor? He's kinda a pervert. But, uhm, I dunno. It feels weird this time. I mean, I haven't used my Quirk in so long, but it's like I don't have full control. I can lower them down, but I don't know how well I'll be able to guide the clouds with no physical form."

"You can't drop my classmate onto the floor from that high up, that's basically assault." Izuku huffs out in answer to Oboro's first proposal. He's not a fan of Mineta, but he is still a classmate. "Try lowering them away from the villains, and take us down right here. I wanna hang by Aizawa-Sensei, and I know you do too."

The cloud-haired boy gives a steady nod, looking up at the two clouds holding his classmates above the chaos. They move slowly, descending away from where they'd last seen the villains.

Simultaneously, Izuku's own cloud starts dropping slowly as well.

Oboro is incredibly focused, hand clutching Izuku's wrist still holding him tight, while the other on his shoulder has move as if he's directing the clouds with it. Honestly, this Quick is insane, and Izuku can't even begin to imagine what Oboro could've possibly done with it when he was alive.

They're almost on the ground when there's a smash like a door had been blown in, in the direction of the entry way—where they'd all gotten separated. Help. Thank God, help had arrived. The Pros were finally here.

Izuku winces at the noise of the explosion, and Oboro staggers back in surprise.

Izuku feels the ghost's hand leave his wrist, and suddenly he's falling. It's not far, but it's enough that he'll be sore later. When he opens his eyes, the clouds are gone. All of them are. It's like they hadn't even existed in the first place. If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, could see Tsuyu and Mineta pulling themselves up off the ground at a safe distance away, he wouldn't have believed it.

He has a view of the villains again; the decay-Quirk one, the warping one and the one they'd called Nomu. "Finally," the one covered in hands drawled with a sigh after a glance in Izuku's direction, "that's over with. Looks like just one of you brats stuck around."

Aizawa-Sensei is left defenseless now too without the clouds for cloaking and protection. But thankfully the attention is on Izuku and not him. He hadn't moved, but he's still breathing. Those odds were as good as any when it came to the damage he'd received. Still, he needed help. And fast.

Oboro was looking worse for the wear, but still kneeling beside Aizawa-Sensei, talking to him so softly Izuku couldn't pick up what he was saying. Sensei remained lifeless at the ghost's side, but Oboro wasn't freaking out, so he wasn't dead. Izuku hoped.

He'd be worried but— "Have no fear, Students." All Might's voice projects from the entrance of the USJ, "I am here."

The decay-Quirked villain grins, swiveling around to stare up at All Might, Izuku and his Sensei forgotten now that a bigger target arrived, "after all this waiting, the heroic piece of trash shows up..."

All Might moves like a flash, taking out all villains in his path as he makes his way to Aizawa-Sensei. He kneels down, Oboro shuffling out of the way with a thankful, yet uncertain expression, as All Might lifts Aizawa-Sensei into his arms.

Izuku can barely blink as All Might grabs him too, even going as far as to grab Tsuyu and Mineta too, who were a bit further away before launching back and setting the both of them down. Oboro had popped

up beside Aizawa-Sensei as well.

“Everyone back to the entrance,” All Might demands, “and bring Aizawa with you. He doesn’t have much time.”

Shota tastes blood after the third or... maybe fourth time the creature slams his head against the concrete. His body aches; the pain is unimaginable. He can hardly breath as the creator grounds his face into the ground. His arms are useless now, his head is thrumming with pain, and his eyes have long since gone blurry.

But he pushes through.

The second he sees that decay-Quirked villain, the leader, running at his kids, he knows he can’t just lie there and wait for the worst. He forces his attention up, using all his strength to activate his own Quirk just as the villain touches all five fingers around Tsuyu’s face.

His face gets jammed further into the crumbles of concrete and it hurts to the point everything’s gone numb. He can hear the altercation of the fight between his students and the villains over the sound of his own lulling heartbeat.

He’s so, so tired, but the moment he feels the creature’s hand off his head, its whole presence gone, he manages to barely lift his head. Just in time to see the creature reaching for Midoriya. He’s got a hold on him, and the other hand is going for his head. Shota wants to get up. He wants to help. But he can’t force himself up. He can barely keep his eyes open, and can barely keep his gaze steady on the fight.

His heart jumps into his throat when someone suddenly appears behind Midoriya—a villain, is his first thought. Oh God, Midoriya was going to die—first that creature aiming to do to Midoriya what it had already done to himself, and then this unknown villain taking the opportunity to attack as well.

But that’s not right. The longer he stares, the clearer it gets. The haze in his eyes clears momentarily and that... no, it’s impossible. It can’t be true. He must’ve died at some point because that’s... it’s *Oboro*.

Looking young as the day he’d died. Just as Shota forces himself to remember his friend.

He’s there, and he’s touching Midoriya.

He’s there... but he’s not. Even at this distance the man can see the translucence of the teenager he’d once known. He’s seeing things. He must really be dying. Or he really is already dead. You don't just randomly start seeing the ghost of your best friend. It's impossible. Illogical. Insane, even.

Shota blinks his eyes for a long second to see if the ghost of his school friend was just an optical illusion. His tired eyes and dying brain playing tricks on him. He’s a man of logic, and that, seeing his long dead high school best friend is certainly not logic.

He’s so tired.

The figure, Oboro, is still standing behind his student when he opens his eyes again.

All logic has gone out the window. He’s so tired, and confused, and he’s almost certain he’s not really seeing Oboro. This has to be in his head. There’s literally no way Oboro can really be there.

The last thing Shota sees before he loses his battle with consciousness is a heavy cloud enveloping around him. It’s so *familiar* it hurts, but so incredibly *foreign* to him that he wants to cry.

Chapter End Notes

> Well, whaddya think? I hope it made sense! I'm posting this after work after roughly editing it. I was planning on saving this update until Christmas, but I couldn't resist posting it! I'll hopefully have the next chapter by Christmas (or perhaps boxing day?) but I'm not sure how busy I'll be.
>
> Anyways! Thanks once again for the comments on the last chapter, they were amazing! I adore you all, and I'm thrilled you're all liking this so much! Also, to the people who commented fic ideas (you know who you are) I loved them! Sorry I couldn't add anything to this chapter, but they'll definitely appear sometime, and I'll be sure to credit you! Feel free to leave suggestions on what you wanna see!
>
> I'm having so much fun with this fic, and I'm truly honored so many of you have joined me for the ride! I really didn't think so many people would be interested, so thank you! For reading, leaving comments and kudos! You're all great!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Happy Holiday and Merry Christmas to those who celebrate! I hope you all had a good day!
>
> This chapter is a bit shorter than usual, but to be honest, I really just wanted to write some soft erasermic (with a bit of plot sprinkled in), so that's what I did. Hopefully you guys like this chapter too!
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota rouses from his hazy, dreamless sleep to an annoying beeping. He keeps his eyes shut, head lulling in the direction the noise is coming from. He has hopes of going back to sleep, like he usually does, praying Hizashi will turn the annoying alarm off, but he doesn't.

He still feels hazy, like his brain isn't completely functioning.

The tired man lulls his head back so he's staring up at the ceiling before finally prying his eyes open. They burn, like he'd gone far too long without resting his Quirk. His eyelid grate against his dry eyes like sandpaper, but what's most surprising, is the fact that his eyes are open, but he's still in the dark.

Well, not quite in the dark. He can faintly see lights bleeding in, but... his vision is white. Like there's something covering his eyes. And it's not just his eyes, but his whole face. If he wasn't so tired, he's sure he'd be panicking, but for now, it is what it is.

He tries in vain to reach up to pull whatever is on his face off, only to frown drowsily when his arms refuse to move. Neither budge, no matter how hard he focuses, or how much of his strength and energy his forces into lifting them up. They're heavy and numb. There might even be an inkling of pain hidden somewhere too, but it's overwhelmed by a floaty feeling.

It takes far longer than Shota would like for him to lay out all the information he'd gathered thus far, trying to make sense of it all.

The answer hits him like a brick.

He was in the hospital.

The beeping wasn't a stupid, insistent alarm that Hizashi forgot to turn off before getting up; it was a heart monitor steadily beeping on. The covering on his face, he assumes, at least, is a bandage of some sort, and his arms refusing to move, in addition to the strange, numb floaty feeling must mean he'd been injured pretty badly.

Now that he thinks about it, it's all there. The sterile scent. The blinding white lights. The rough blankets on the bed, and the pillows drawing a fine line between cardboard textured and uncomfortably overstuffed. The smell he now notices is that of medical gauze and cotton bandages wrapped around his face.

He's not a stranger to hospitals—no Pro Hero is—but it has been a while since he'd been this beat up.

It takes a few more contemplative moments for him to remember how exactly he'd ended up here.

And if the knowledge that he was in the hospital at all hit him like a brick, then reason as to why he's here plows into him like a freight truck.

The USJ.

The villain attack.

His students, oh God, his students.

It all floods back like a tsunami washing over him; leaving his students in the capable hands of Thirteen, rushing the crowds of villains in an attempt to keep them away from his kids. He remembers the leader villain, the one with the powerful— *was it a decaying Quirk?* — that he'd used on Shota's elbow, and the one with the warp Quirk standing loyally at the leader's side. And... and that creature, the one with the insane strength. Whatever that thing was. He remembers being tossed around like a weightless doll, and having his head ground into the concrete—the explanation for the bandages on his face.

He remembers the pain of his arms snapping under the creatures slow, steady movements. How so little effort from it had him screaming out in agony. The pain of his face grinding against splintered concrete, and the metallic taste of his own blood as it both pools in his mouth, and runs down his face only to catch on his lips.

He has half a mind to lick at his lips now, hazy brain supplying phantoms feelings of blood cascading down his face, but thinks better of it with the cotton bandages wrapped so snugly. Last thing he needs right now it to choke on cotton specs.

Shota forces his attention back onto what he remembers of the villain attack—being stomped down whenever he tried to fight back, or even so much as move. The thought of it makes pain flare throughout his body, but it's swiftly washed away by whatever pain killer they have him on. They're strong, thankfully.

Everything gets a bit hazier after that.

He remembers seeing Midoriya, Tsuyu and Minoru in the water by where he and the villains had been fighting. A huff of frustration struggles out of his lungs. That Problem Child no doubt brought the two other students along with him. He'd told them to stay away—to stay with Thirteen, but he's honestly not surprised. He briefly wonders how much his kids saw, eyes fluttering shut as he realized they'd probably seen a lot.

His eyelids jolt open when the next piece of the attacks clears in his mind.

The decaying Quirked villain had been running at his kids. He'd tried to turn his students into dust. Were they okay? Had he managed to stop the Quirk in time? Had he gotten to Tsuyu before he could erase his Quirk?

It's staticky, but he thinks he had managed to activate his Quirk in time. He faintly remembers the villain talking to him, a sick mixture of impressed and annoyed, but after that it gets a bit fuzzy again.

He wonders if it was because he was drifting between consciousness and unconsciousness, but can't be sure. Maybe he'd just been blacking out, or simply didn't remember the exchange.

He tries to remember what else happens before he ultimately loses his consciousness battle. He wracks his brain for anything of importance in those final moments of awareness—

Hit brain comes to an abrupt halt.

Oboro.

He'd seen Oboro.

Oboro... with Midoriya. His friend who'd died at the young age of seventeen, thirteen years ago had been standing behind his current student. Logically, he knows he couldn't have been there. Even in his hazy memories, he remembers the translucentness of the boy who'd been one of his best friends throughout school.

He's trying hard to come up with a logical excuse for it.

Oboro was dead.

There was no way he could've been there. There was no way. It was illogical. Dead people don't come back; when you die... you die. So how had he seen his school friend?

Shota's about to let the whole thing go. He'd been hanging by an inch of his own life. He'd been so close to death—seconds away from passing out from a cocktail of pain and exhaustion. There's no way he'd really seen Oboro. It was just his brain playing tricks on him— a ghost from the past. Someone he hadn't been able to save there to stir up all the guilt he'd been walling off for years.

It was silly. A ghost. He'd seen the ghost of his dead friend, looking exactly as Shota remembers him—or, chooses to remember him at least. The Oboro that he struggles to remember when he thinks of his friend. The smiling, exuberant Oboro he'd seen every day at school, as opposed to the Oboro he'd last seen that last day after...

Shota swallows hard, mouth dry.

Ghosts didn't exist. It was illogical. He'd just been seeing things. It was *impossible*.

But that didn't explain the *clouds*, his traitorous brain reminded in a whisper at the back of his mind.

The clouds. Oh God, there had been clouds. Clouds like that were not as easily brushed off as seeing a potential ghost. Clouds don't just appear—and certainly not in contained spaces like the USJ. Not even to mention the fact that those clouds were so *real*, nothing manmade could've created them.

He'd been pretty out of it at that point, but he remembers the clouds. He remembers feeling them envelope him just like they'd used to during his school days when Oboro used to practice different cloud types and consistencies, often using himself and Hizashi as test subjects when it came to density control and strength for escorting

people around other than himself. He remembers the softness in Oboro's care when handling them, the density that had filled in around him at the blink of an eye.

Someone, or something had used the Quirk: Cloud.

And the only person to ever have such Quirk (as far as Shota knows), with as much pointed precision and control over it like he'd seen at the USJ before passing out, had died years ago. Taking that incredible Quirk along with one of the kindest people Shota had ever known.

"Shota?" Shota jumps at the call of the soft voice. The bed shifts a little, and it's just then Shota realizes that someone, Hizashi, his brain adds, must've been sleeping on the edge of his mattress. "Sweetheart, are you awake and panicking, or do I need to call for a nurse?"

It's only after the startled, tired words from his husband that Shota realizes his heart monitor is beeping wildly in warning, and he can feel his heart thumping anxiously in his chest. He can almost picture Hizashi's worried expression at being startled awake by it—bottom lip caught between his teeth, being worried nervously as a small frown tugs at the corners of his lips.

"No nurse," Shota manages to croak out, wincing at how hoarse he sounds, "I... I'm awake."

Shota tries in vain to calm him raging heart, but his thoughts are still clouding his brain. He's so confused. He'd seen Oboro, and he'd seen the cloud Quirk. He'd seen both, when logically, he shouldn't have seen either. Oboro was dead. The Quirk had died along with him.

Shota feels Hizashi's fingers fan out along his hip, thumb stroking slow, comforting lines across his blanket covered skin. It does wonders to calm his heart, not enough that he's calmed completely, but enough that the machine isn't beeping fast, or loud enough to draw in unwanted attention from medical staff.

"Do you know where you are, Sho?"

The dark-haired man ducks his head in a painful nod, grunting out his location for no other reason than to appease his husband, "hospital."

"Do you remember what happened?"

"Villains," Shota forces out bluntly, voice dry and cracking.

His thoughts are still running rampant in his head. He knows he should be asking about his students. About the well-being of Tsuyu, Midoriya and Minoru, as well as all of his students who he hadn't seen since sending them off with Thirteen.

He can only hope they followed instructions better than Midoriya and the other two.

He knows he should ask about them though; make them his first concern as their teacher, but his lagging brain is still stuck on one thing. On one person, and the question slips out past his pain medication-stalled brain-to-mouth filter, "where's Oboro?"

"Where's O-Oboro?" Hizashi's fingers still against his hip, tensing just the slightest bit before his husband forces them back into motion. It's not as smooth now, an anxious shake to his hands that Hizashi is trying to hide. "Baby... Oboro is... well, w-what's the last thing you remember, Sweetheart?"

At this, Shota scoffs under the bandages.

"I don't have brain damage, or memory loss, 'zashi. I... I know that he's..." Shota sucks in a breath that tastes faintly of sterile cotton, feeling stupid for even mentioning Oboro. Of course, it had been an illusion. Oboro is dead. He'd simply been seeing things with his body and mind in such a weak, exhausted state. "It's been thirteen years since *that* villain attack. I was at the USJ with my 1-A students and Thirteen. We were *supposed* to be doing rescue training, but instead we were attacked by villains. It's hazy, but I remember it."

"That's a relief, Sho," Hizashi mutters, fingers losing the tension and trailing up towards his stomach before drawing back and repeating the motion. Hizashi is a touchy-feely kinda person, and he's the only one Shota will allow to touch him like this. It calms them both simultaneously. "I was warned you might've woken up confused, or even with loss of memory due to the head injury, for a second there, I thought it was true... I had no idea how I would've eased ya into thirteen years worth of memory loss."

"No," Shota replies tiredly, trying (and failing) to lift a hand to touch his husband. He gives up trying to move, but faintly feels the soft pressure of Hizashi's other hand settling over his bandage covered wrist. "I remember it all... and then some, I suppose. I guess I wasn't in my right mind towards the end... Is everyone alright? The students? Thirteen?"

Hizashi blows out a slow breath, and Shota tenses up at the reaction.

“Everyone’s alive,” the blonde-haired man allows softly, the fingers on Shota’s hip slowing thoughtfully. “You and Thirteen took the worst of the damage. You’ve been out for two days, and Thirteen has been here too due one of those villains using her own Quirk against her. The students are all okay; minor injuries mostly, nothing more than scrapes and bruises. Midoriya had a couple broken fingers, and uh, well, he broke his legs using his Quirk again. There was some bad bruising on his arm, but Recovery Girl took care of him.”

Shota’s quiet for a second, just enjoying the way Hizashi’s fingers trail against his side, “and what’s the damage?”

“You broke both your arms, in multiple places. Chiyo came by after dealing with the students to speed up the process, but she only managed to mend the worst of the breaks. You were pretty exhausted by that point. You had a nasty concussion as well, hence the memory loss warning...” Hizashi pauses for a second, and Shota feels his husband shifting subconsciously like he wants to add something more.

“What?” Shota tilts his head to the side that the hands are located, squeezing his eyes shut as he refrains from wincing at the sharp pain his movements prompt. Hizashi, too wise for his own good, spots the action easily, hand lifting off of Shota’s wrist to gently cup his cheek.

“Try not to move around so much, Babe, you’re gonna be doing a lot of au naturel healing until your stamina builds up.” The words are accompanied by his thumb carefully stroking Shota’s gauze covered cheek before he pulls away with a tired sigh.

The hand on his hip is retracted as well, but there’s a weight on the bed that signifies Hizashi crossing his arms on the mattress and leaning forwards. “There was some damage to your eyes too. They’re not sure if the damage will last, or if it’s even impacted your vision at all, but it’s a possibility.”

“Okay,” the breath feels like it’s knocked out of Shota’s lungs as he lets Hizashi’s words sink in. He’d known some of those hits had been too close to his eyes for comfort. He knows there’d been pain, stinging in his eyes from concrete debris and impact. But he also knows he saw Oboro and Midoriya just fine after all that had taken place. Maybe it was a bit fuzzy, but he could see. “Anything else?”

“Besides some sexy, badass scars? Not really. Your elbow took a hit that stumped the doctors and Chiyo. She couldn’t really do much to

help with it, and there's a fairly deep wound below your eye that will also scar. And, of course, none of that stuff scratches the surface of the *mental* trauma that'll certainly leave a scar."

"There is no mental trauma," Shota scoffs, though he's almost sure Hizashi will already be booking him a therapist appointment for after he's discharged from the hospital. And he'll dutifully go, despite his protests because the both of them preach mental health to their students when they need it, and he's not a hypocrite.

"I beg to differ, Babe."

Shota stiffly shakes his head, which prompts a screech of concern from Hizashi: "Shota*aAA!* Quit movin' around so much! You'll hurt yourself!"

Shota relaxes into the pillows, silently wishing he could use his Quirk on his loudly protective husband. "Loud." The raven mutters helplessly as he angles his chin upwards, and if his eyes were open and uncovered, he'd be staring at the ceiling as he mulls over Hizashi's comment on his elbow, "it was a Quirk."

"Awh, I'm sorry, Sho. I bet your head's still a bit sore, huh? I'll try'n keep it down, but I'm used to you shutting me up when I forget..." Hizashi's sheepish voice quiets for a moment after that, before he speaks again, slow and almost confused, "what was?"

"My elbow," Shota feels tired again, like the conversation had drained what little energy he'd woken up with. "The villain, the leader of the League of Villains, has a decaying Quirk of some sort. I don't know how it works, but I think it has something to do with his fingers. It was only when he put all five fingers on my elbow that his Quirk activated. He's clever, 'zashi, he figured out my Quirk through observing me fighting the other villains he brought in. He figured out my hair was the tell that my Quirk was active..."

"The League of Villains?" Hizashi's voice took a careful edge to it, and Shota could see the frown on his husband's face. "I haven't heard of them before..."

Shota hadn't either, so he raises his shoulders in a pained shrug. "They're the real deal—they broke into Yuuei during the confusion of the media getting in, they're the ones who *let* the media in as a distraction. They targeted us when most of the Pros would be busy sorting out that mess. They managed to get passed our security measures... that's no easy feat. They're smart. A serious threat."

“What did they want?” Hizashi asks slowly, “I mean, you don’t just break into a such a highly secure school for shits and giggles unless you either want something, or you’re trying to prove something. Nezu was pretty tightlipped about it, and to be frank, I didn’t stick around long to chat with the students after making sure they were all alright, not when you were in the state you were in.”

“All Might,” Shota breathes out a stuttered breath. “They were looking for All Might, the students were just easy targets and bait. They knew he was supposed to be there with Thirteen and I… He was going to kill them, ‘zashi. He was going to use his decay Quirk on Tsuyu, Midoriya and Minoru while I was—”

“They’re okay, Sho.” Hizashi’s voice is soft and delicate; as is the way he shifts slightly, before all his weight disappears from the bed.

There’s a second where Shota panics, but it’s abruptly quelled by the fact the pressure returns, only now, Hizashi’s weight is at his side; a hip pressing against Shota’s own as the voice hero settles gently beside him. He feels Hizashi’s arm curling around his shoulder, carefully pulling him against his side in an attempt not to irritate his injuries. Shota allows himself to be man-handled, melting back into his husband’s shoulder.

He resists the urge to curl completely into his husband, just for the sake of his aching arms and face, letting Hizashi’s soothing voice calm him instead, “you kept them safe. Tsuyu told me you did. You kept them all safe. You and Thirteen.”

“It shouldn’t have happened,” Shota croaks out, his heart monitor gives a panicked string of beeps before evening out again as Shota forces himself to calm down. “They’ve only been at Yuuei for two weeks, and they’ve already encountered dozens of villains. That’s too soon. They’re too young, Zashi. Too inexperienced right now…”

“I know,” Shota feels Hizashi’s cheek press against his temple, holding him close. “You can’t control villain attacks, Sho. They’re bound to happen in this society, the best we can do is keep them safe, and teach them how to keep themselves and others safe in the process. And you did. They’re all just fine.”

Shota doesn’t say anything, just angles his head to tuck under Hizashi’s chin. His husband lets out a fond huff as he tightens his grip perfectly so Shota feels secure, but also so his injuries aren’t being aggravated. “Anyways, the kids are all fine, so do me a favor, yeah?

Worry about you. You look like a mummy wrapped up like that. Also... I'm a lil'disappointed only one of us is concerned about your well-being, and it's not *you*."

Shota lets out a gruff huff; halfheartedly straightening up to bump the top of his head against Hizashi's chin in retaliation. It's entirely worth the sharp jolt of pain at his movements.

"Hey!" the blonde yelps, but it's quickly overpowered by soft snorts of amused laughter at Shota's expense. He feels, just faintly, Hizashi rubbing at his chin with the hand not wrapped around him, before it drops to pat Shota's head. "You've got one thick head, Babe."

"You have a bony chin, 'zashi."

"Hey!" Hizashi squawks a second time. Hizashi's feigned annoyance doesn't carry on long—it's just seconds later that the blonde-haired man his turning his own head so his cheek settles on the top of Shota's head. His arm has curled around entirely, hand resting against Shota's sternum, where his finger draws lazy shapes.

They settle into a comfortable silence that's only disturbed by the repetitive, soft beeps of the heart monitor. It's long since steadied out, and Shota knows that's entirely Hizashi's presence and the fact he's tucked in close to him.

"Hey, Sho..." Hizashi's voice breaks the silence.

The dark-haired man gives a hum of acknowledgement, but doesn't move a muscle.

"You were... Earlier, when you first woke up, w-what brought up Oboro? Why... why did you think he was here?"

"It's stupid," the man shakes his head now, letting out a sigh. "I thought that I... I *thought* I saw him there... With Midoriya. But that's impossible, because he's dead."

"Sho..." Hizashi sucks in a sharp breath.

"I know," Shota lets out a second, deeper sigh.

He knows what Hizashi's thinking.

The last time he'd been hellbent on seeing Oboro had been just after that villain attack that had taken Oboro's life. He'd been so sure he'd

heard Oboro's voice in the comms. He'd heard his friend promising he was okay, and telling him to keep going and that he could do it—so he had.

And it was only after everyone was safe, and the villain apprehended that reality crashed down on him. Where he'd come to realize Oboro's comm had been busted; where he'd begged and pleaded to see Oboro, who he'd been certain was still alive.

"This isn't like that," Shota squeezes his eyes tighter shut. "It was just an illogical illusion. Maybe it was guilt—not being able to save my kids like I wasn't able to save him, or maybe it was just my brain placing someone there with them who I know would protect them even if I was unable..."

"You were exhausted and in pain," Hizashi's breath floods across Shota's shoulder. "That's alright, Sho. Even if it was illogical, I'm glad it's him you saw. He'd protect those kids to his last breath..." the *again* was left unsaid, but heard loud and clear by Shota.

"Y'know," Hizashi hums softly after a second's pause, "I think he would've taken a shine to Midoriya. They kinda got the same smile, ya'dig? Florescent personalities... wild determination..."

Shota lets out a soft laugh that comes out more like a snort, "I think you're right."

Shota leans back more, now angling himself so the back of his head is supported on Hizashi's shoulder. He doesn't feel the stiffness of Hizashi's leather hero costume, so he assumes his husband is in his civilian clothes.

The fatigue is catching up to him now, and by the hum his husband gives, he's sure that a new round of pain medication is being administered via IV drip. That floaty feeling is coming back.

"I'm glad I got to see him again..." Shota mumbles drowsily, "even if just for a second. He looked so... normal. Like he hadn't aged a day. Still so bright."

"I wish I could've seen," Hizashi whispers in reply, letting his own head lean against Shota, cheek settling against the raven's temple. "Feelin' tired, Sweetheart? You should rest up so Chiyo can use her Quirk to help your healing along. I hate seeing you like this..."

Shota gives a languid hum, subconsciously curling in closer. "I miss

him."

"Me too," Hizashi sighs, reaching up to rub at his face with the hand not around Shota.

"I just..."

"Just what, Sho?"

"He wasn't there... he couldn't have been. But... I saw him and... I saw the *clouds* too... I can make excuses for seeing him; there's plenty, but I can't find a logical explanation for those clouds..."

Shota's already so far gone in the medication he doesn't feel Hizashi tense behind him. He doesn't feel his husband turn to look at him—to stare at his bandage covered face, jaw dropping at the words.

Hizashi's mouth feels dry, eyes widened as he regards his husband carefully.

"Shh, just... you just rest now, okay? We'll talk more later, alright?"

Another barely audible hum from Shota, followed by both his breaths and heart monitor slowly evening out.

Hizashi had arrived at The USJ with the rest of the teachers.

All classes had been put on lockdown at the news that the USJ was infested with villains, but the only thought to cross Hizashi's mind was that that was where Shota and 1-A had been training. Dozens of villains against two Pro Heros and twenty first year students who barely had two weeks of classes under their belts.

There's a rush of all available Pros, Iida from Shota's class tagging along with them.

All Might had apparently already arrived at the USJ, and Hizashi could only hope that there were no casualties; students or teachers.

Iida had reported dozens of criminals—speaking fast and desperately, which was different to how the young man usually talked so formally. It must be bad if it had Iida Tenya so flustered.

When they'd arrived, just a couple minutes after All Might, but a lot can happen in just a couple minutes when it comes to villain fights, so everyone got to work. Snipe took out the bigger threats with his

precision shots, while Hizashi himself cleared the stairs leading to the exit with his Quirk, easily overpowering the horde of the villains who were slowly trekking up to get to the students.

He'd seen Shota out of the corner of his eye, draped over Shoji's back and shoulders and hanging lifelessly. The panic of seeing him like that had his heart pounding in his chest, but he knew he had to keep himself together.

Not only did the students not know the two of them were married, but he'd also like to not show any sort of affection that could negatively affect either his own, or Shota's hero work, when there was so many villains around.

Besides, the students would be more panicked if his husband was dead. He was just badly hurt. That's what he kept telling himself, at least. Still, he's not sure he'll ever be able to forget how still, and bloody Shota is on Shoji's back. It's something out of his own personal nightmares.

He was badly injured—that's all Hizashi could see every time he snuck a glance over his shoulder, or let his eyes linger too long. He wanted nothing more than to sprint to Shota's side, and take him into his arms.

But he can't yet. He has to make sure the students are alright. He has to help with the clean up here. Shota was alive. He was alive, and currently in an ambulance on the way to the hospital for help—and if anything did happen to Shota, he'd be called, considering he was Shota's healthcare proxy.

So, until he got that call, he'd do damage control with the other teachers until he could manage to slip away to be with his husband.

It doesn't take long to neutralize all the villains. All Might had appeared to be in a heated battle with one of the main villains when they'd arrived, and Hizashi had only had a second where his heart had dropped into his stomach at seeing Midoriya, Bakugou, Kirishima and Todoroki right there in the fight with him.

He had to trust All Might not to let any of the kids be harmed.

The villain All Might is facing off against gets shot by Snipe a couple times before he can get his hands on any of the kids (he'd been trying to reach Midoriya, but thankfully was rerouted by the shot). Thirteen, injured, but still fighting, tries to capture the two villains in her Quirk,

but they manage to warp out of the USJ before either can be apprehended, or caught in the blackhole Quirk.

Hizashi has a sneaking suspicion that that's how all these villains got in in the first place.

After securing the place, Detective Naomasa and his officers arrive in, and the students are escorted out of the building. And, now that the threat's gone too, Thirteen is loaded into an ambulance and sent to the hospital.

Hizashi doesn't see Midoriya, or All Might after the event. He'd just barely seen Cementoss wall off the number-one hero and the student he'd taken a liking too. He'd definitely overdone it, no doubt in his weak form after all that. Hizashi's just glad he'd managed to keep it up for the whole fight.

The blonde watches halfheartedly as a huge creature thing is collected and cuffed. Securely cuffed, and loaded into a secure Quirk cancelling SWAT truck. It doesn't speak, or do anything other than move as directed.

Hizashi shuffles his cellphone from his pocket to see if he's got a call from the hospital, but there's nothing yet.

So, he'll check in with some of the students.

Bakugou, Kirishima and Todoroki are all stood together, frowns on their faces.

"Okay, Listeners?" Hizashi cocks his head. "No injuries, you three are all okay?"

"We're okay," Todoroki answers with a light frown.

"We're good," Kirishima agrees before biting his lip, "I dunno about Midoriya though. I went to see if he was okay, but Cementoss wouldn't let me."

"Midoriya's fine," Hizashi promises, because he hadn't heard anything about any students with severe injuries. "He's with All Might, I think they're going to Recovery Girl, so I'm sure you three can see him after the Detective's finished with everyone's statements."

"I don't wanna see that stupid Deku." Bakugou hisses, turning his back to the group, but not moving away. Hizashi just arches an eyebrow at

his back before looking between Todoroki and Kirishima.

“Well,” the voice hero clears his throat, giving the other two a small smile, “if you boys did, that’s where he’d be. Give him a bit of a breather first though, ya’dig?”

“Totally,” Kirishima grins.

Pleased with that, Hizashi makes his rounds through the 1-A class. He makes a mental list of kids he’s going to recommend to HoundDog to check in on throughout the next couple weeks. In a perfect world they’d all go see him, but for now, he’s pinpointing the ones who look the most shaken from the incident.

The last two students left to check in with are Tsuyu and Mineta, who’ve been talking with a detective for a while. He’d passed by them twice already, but they just no seem to be finishing up their statements, so the voice hero makes a beeline for them.

“Listeners! I’ve been waiting to check in with you two, have you been giving your statements this whole time?”

“We have. Ribbit.” Tsuyu nods solemnly.

“That was so crazy!” Mineta exclaims, looking up at him in awe. “We almost died.”

And that... well, that’s not something anyone wants to hear from a teenager’s mouth. Hizashi forces his expression to stay neutral, schooling his features.

He tries to think of a way to respond to that—*I'm sorry?* No. *That’s... that’s cool?* Definitely no. Instead, he blinks in surprise before forcing out his words, “I understand this was very traumatic incident. HoundDog, our school guidance counsellor, will be checkin’ in on you guys over the next few days, but please, if you have concerns or need to talk seek him out, do. Or even another teacher or guardian.”

“It was scary, ribbit,” Tsuyu tells him with a frown.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Listener,” Hizashi tells her honestly.

“Scary?” Mineta whines, “that was terrifying! We’d be toast if it weren’t for Sensei and Midoriya!”

“You were with Midoriya and Eraserhead?” Hizashi tried hard to

school his surprise.

Tsuyu nods, “they saved me. A villain tried to use his Quirk on me, but Sensei erased his Quirk before he could—”

“And then Midoriya turns around and tried to punch ‘im!” Mineta continues loudly.

Tsuyu regards the short boy before looking back at Hizashi, “he did, ribbit. But he ended up punching that monster thing the police found, but it didn’t really work. It was strong.”

“I thought we were goners,” Mineta’s face drops into and expression of sheer fear. “It grabbed Midoriya, and went to squash him like it did to Sensei, but then these... these clouds just up and appeared out of nowhere!”

Clouds? Out of nowhere? In a closed in building?

“Clouds?” Hizashi prompts after a second of thought.

Hizashi looks back towards the USJ as if he’d suddenly notice these clouds the students were talking about. He’d been in there earlier, and hadn’t seen any clouds.

“Weird, right? They filled in so fast, we couldn’t even see each other! And then they were lifting us up, and carrying us away. Just us two though, I dunno what happened to Midoriya. There was even a cloud hiding Sensei from the villains!”

“Ribbit,” Tsuyu nodded. “It’s true. But they disappeared suddenly and we fell a little bit. All the clouds disappeared at once. We... we think it was a villain who’d rescued us.”

“A villain?” Hizashi turns to look at them with raised eyebrows. "A villain... rescue you guys?"

The two students shrugged.

"We know everyone in our classes' Quirks..." Tsuyu reminds with a frown, "so it wasn't any of us. And it wasn't Sensei, or Thirteen... that just leaves the villains."

As true as that was, Hizashi just couldn't see it. A villain going against the plan and saving hero course students? The chances of that happening are in the negatives. There's not a lot of suitable

explanations for the clouds, but a villain going rouge in the middle of an attack? Nearly impossible.

Plus, a Quirk like that would've been documented.

"And you two told the Detective all of this?"

"Sure did!" Mineta grins. "Too cool not to share. Those clouds were so cool, and how they just disappeared too! It almost makes up for the fact we almost died. Almost. That still sucked."

Hizashi eyes the kid for a second, only to jolt as his phone buzzes in his pocket. His heart hammers in his chest as he's reminded of his husband's condition. The blonde-haired man forces a smile at the two teens before taking a step back and sliding his phone out of his pocket, "excuse me, Listeners, I gotta take this, yo."

With a wave thrown over his shoulder, he answers the call and makes his way towards the school, where he'll pick up the car and make his way to the hospital after stopping at home to change into his civilian clothes. Last thing he needs it to be hassled by Present Mic fans when all he wants to do is be with his injured husband.

Hizashi spends the whole drive home, and to the hospital with his thoughts teetering between Shota, and the mysterious clouds the students had witnessed.

Chapter End Notes

> Thanks once again for all the activity this fic has been getting! I'm so glad you guys are liking it as much as I am! I hope this chapter runs as smoothly as I think it does right now, but it's 1AM, and my eyes are giving out on me now. I'll probably reread and edit tomorrow, but no promises :)
>
> As always, comments and kudos are greatly appreaciated! I hope you guys enjoyed this soft hospital chapter! I'll be getting back on track with the plot in a few days, so look forward to that!
>
> Anyways, thanks again for reading, and one last happy holidays to all you lovely readers!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! Back again with another chapter! Ngl, I wrote myself into a writers block, stared at this for a few days and then finished it all just now. Be warned, this chapter is very lightly edited as of posting, and I'm lowkey super tired, so expect mistakes that I'll probably edit tomorrow!
>
> Thanks again for all the activity this has been getting! I adore all your comments, and seeing the kudos go up! It makes my day to know you guys like this as much as I do!
>
> Anyways! I hope you enjoy this chapter, because I sure did after figuring out what I was doing with it! xD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku hadn't seen Oboro since he'd sent him away with Aizawa-Sensei after All Might had arrived in. The ghost had been hesitant, looking between Izuku and Sensei, who was draped over Shoji's back.

Izuku had blatantly told the ghost to go with Sensei—even if Oboro had put up a halfhearted fight that he should stay. The fight wasn't over just because All Might had arrived in—there were still villains milling about, and students scattered across the USJ arena. Izuku knew that Oboro wanted to be with him, that he wanted to help out, but he also knew he desperately wanted to be with Aizawa-Sensei too.

So, Izuku had made the decision for his friend, head lulling in the Oboro's general direction, taking effort not to focus his gaze on the ghost directly as he forces out a stern *"Go."* that Oboro would be stupid to refute. And he follows that up with a half-smile shot in the ghost's direction, *"Sensei needs someone with him... For my sake, stay with him, and...and come find me if anything changes for the worst, alright?"*

And just like that, Oboro had a mission. Hitting two birds with one stone; tagging along with Aizawa-Sensei, while also being Izuku's personal message boy should it come down to that (the green-haired boy prays it doesn't, but he's glad to know that he'll know directly if something does happen, instead of how teachers tend to skirt around the truth to spare their feelings).

So, the ghost had left, following behind Shoji and Aizawa-Sensei, almost afraid to get to close. He hovers, but from a distance, shooting uncertain looks back at Izuku until they're out of sight.

It's not too long after they're gone that the rest of the Pro teachers arrive—he hears Present Mic before he sees him, the echoing effect of his Quirk making Izuku's ears ring the faintest bit. He almost feels sorry for the villains in close range, because Present Mic was actually *aiming* his voice at them, Izuku was just getting the second-hand waves.

Still, Izuku stays by All Might's side, because he knows something the others don't. All Might isn't doing so well. He knows that All Might's power usage quota was getting smaller and smaller the more he exerted himself, and he's almost sure that's why he hadn't been with Sensei and Thirteen that morning.

Not even to mention the fact that this creature, the Nomu, can withstand the power of Izuku's One for All punch, so in turn, it gives All Might a run for his money too.

The boy is exhaustingly glad when Kirishima, Kacchan and Todoroki join them in the battle. He's not sure how much longer he and All Might could've lasted alone. Kacchan just barely manages to save Izuku's face from crumbling apart like Aizawa-Sensei's elbow had when the decaying-Quirked villain's arm shoots out through the warping portal, heading straight for Izuku's face.

Everything comes to an abrupt end when the decay-Quirked villain gets shot—once and then a couple more times for good measure. He doesn't need to look to see Pro Hero: Snipe at the entrance of the USJ, the last place he'd seen the rest of his classmates.

The villain and his sidekick, the warping villain, are gone before Izuku can so much as glance in their direction. They've warped away in the confusion of the Pros arriving in with their Quirks, All Might launching their attack Nomu out of the building, and Thirteen (who Izuku peers at in genuine surprise because holy heck she's *injured*), who's trying to capture them in her Blackhole Quirk.

As upsetting as that is, the two most dangerous villains of all who'd arrived in for the ambush had gotten away, he was also incredibly relieved. Everyone was safe now—the biggest threats gone, and the Pros were quickly rounding up those remaining villains for the police, who were no doubt on the way. His classmates were all being found

and brought back, and as far as he could see, no one was injured too badly.

Izuku can see the steam coming off of All Might, and he knows that he wouldn't have been able to handle staying in his form for much longer. Even now, he's struggling.

They're saved just in the nick of time as Cementoss erects a cement wall between Izuku and All Might, and Kacchan, Kirishima and Todoroki. It just as his friends leave his view that All Might's bulky hero form collapses into the weak state Izuku had first seen on top of that building that first day of meeting the Hero.

It's a blur after that.

The two of them are whisked away by Pros, hidden away from students being escorted out to safety and the police flooding in to contain and arrest the villains that remain.

All Might promises that Izuku is fine to be with him, despite his state, and then promptly uses Izuku's injuries to grant him a ticket to Recovery Girl along with him. It's surprising, in a way it shouldn't be, that most of the Pro Hero teachers know of All Might's weakened state. Izuku wonders briefly how many actually know of One for All, but determines that very *few* must because All Might is so hesitant about it.

He'd been upset when Izuku had told Kacchan, and he still needed to break the news that he's maybe, kinda mentioned it to Sensei, even if he hadn't given out any vital details.

Still, they know enough to be worried about Izuku seeing his weak form. Cementoss actually apologizes for not being able to wall Izuku off like he had the others, but All Might just laughs at it, as he awkwardly rubs at the back of his neck, promising that it's fine and that he doesn't mind *a* student seeing as opposed to *four* students seeing.

Izuku doesn't remember a lot of his time with Recover Girl. He remembers her pressing a kiss to his forehead and he remembers the pain of his shattered fingers easing as they healed. He thinks he remembers Recovery Girl hitting All Might, a growl of words shot at him, but he doesn't remember what she'd said.

And then she'd stepped out. Possibly to check on the other students outside the USJ now that Izuku and All Might were taken care of.

Maybe even to go to Aizawa-Sensei and Thirteen, who were in serious need of a good healer like her.

For a moment, Izuku thinks the worst. What is Sensei wasn't okay? He'd be okay, right? He'd been... he'd looked bad slumped over Shoji's shoulders. He was severely injured, but he'd be okay... Right?

Izuku puts an abrupt stop to those worrying thoughts when he remembers that Oboro is with him, and he's sure he'd have a side of sobbing ghost had anything happened to his Sensei. Oboro had promised to report back, and he trusted the ghost to keep him in the loop.

All Might had been silent at Izuku's side. The teen was drowsily settled on the bed, staring down at his bandaged fingers. The bones were mending, and he could see the edges of the dark bruising not covered by bandages lightening. It hurt still, but nowhere near what it had been.

"Are your injuries still sore, Young Midoriya?"

Izuku snaps his attention to his mentor, shaking his head. "No, not... not really. A bit sore, I guess, but I can handle it. I was... I was thinking."

"What about?"

"Sensei," Izuku almost winces as he says the name. Izuku brain stalls on the fact that All Might is technically also his Sensei. He's sure All Might got the gist of it, Aizawa was their main Sensei, still, he feels the need to correct himself, so he slowly repeats himself to clear up any confusion, "I mean... Aizawa-Sensei. He... well, you saw him."

"I did," the man winces a nod, leaning back in his chair beside Izuku's bed, "I'm sure he'll be alright, My Boy. Aizawa is a strong, persistent man. It'll take more than that to get rid of him."

"Yeah," Izuku mutters absently. He can't help but think of the worst. He'd seen Sensei have his face pressed into the concrete. He'd seen how Oboro, who'd had a front seat view, had wailed in frustration. And then had bad Sensei had looked as he was carried out... Izuku was sure he'd have nightmares. "I hope so."

There's a lingering of silence. Izuku stares blankly at the wall, but he can feel All Might's eyes on him. He's studying him, watching him carefully. But Izuku trust All Might. They've gotten close since that

first encounter.

“Is there something else on your mind, My Boy?”

Izuku lets his attention drift back to his mentor, chewing on his lip thoughtfully. He knows he’s gotta tell All Might. The hero deserves to know that someone else knows about the Quirk, well, *kinda*.

He hadn’t spilled the beans about One for All, thankfully, but he had mentioned his new Quirk. And to someone as observant as Aizawa, he’s not sure how long it’ll be before his Sensei starts noticing things and piecing it all together.

He doesn’t want to keep secrets from All Might, and he knows that the Number One hero might start getting suspicious of the extra training sessions he has with Sensei. And it’s best he tell him now, instead of down the road after All Might has been mauled by Aizawa-Sensei for giving Izuku a Quirk as powerful as One for All as hazardously as he had. So... yeah, he should probably give Toshinori a bit of a heads up.

Aizawa-Sensei was already upset enough that Izuku hadn’t told him at the beginning of the year that he’d just recently gotten his Quirk, he’d hate to think about what Sensei would do to the Number One Hero, who he already has a dislike of, when he finds out All Might had explicitly told Izuku not to tell anyone.

“There’s... something I have to tell you.”

“Oh?” Toshinori prompts with a tilt of his head, “you can tell me anything.”

“Sensei, uhm, he kinda knows about my Quirk.”

All Might freezes abruptly, gaze searching Izuku for any sign he was joking. The man draws in a steadying breath before his gaze locks back on the boy, “knows... what?”

“Not about One for All!” Izuku hurries to say, heart thrumming with panic, “I promise! Just... just that I got it recently. I uhm I told him that I got it on the day of the Entrance Exam, but he thinks I’m just... a late bloomer. I just, I couldn’t... it’s not fair to do it alone, All Might. I know that you... you *did*, but I *can’t* and I’m falling behind in class, and this is my dream—I-I I want to be a hero, but I can’t do it alone--”

“I didn’t do it alone,” All Might frowns, gaze surveying over the teen softly. “I had a mentor too.”

“You did?” a breath rushes out of Izuku’s lungs.

“Yes, I did.” The man gives a light laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. “I… I apologize, young Midoriya. I’m not… I’m not a good mentor. Not like my mentor was. I know it’s not fair, I do. I know I haven’t been great at this; you’ve been making more progress alone than you have been with me. You’ve had to shoulder a lot of this alone, and that isn’t fair either. I’ve been… completely unfair. I suppose I got ahead of myself. We’re different people, and I… I had a really good teacher when it came to learning One for All.”

“You’re not angry?” Izuku frowns. He shifts antsily on the bed, wincing as his broken fingers tense anxiously. All Might hadn’t been angry when Izuku had told Kacchan, but he hadn’t been pleased either. He’d seen the unease in the man’s eyes, but there was none of that now.

“At myself? Yes.” Toshinori sighs, hunching forwards, “at you? No. To tell you the truth, I’m a little relieved Aizawa knows. He’s a good teacher and I know he’ll aid you, and your process of mastering One for All far better than I. I regret not being there when you needed me, and I regret not being able to give you the help you deserve. I’ve been a subpar mentor for you, but I hope you’ll still come to me with any question about One for All that you might have.”

“Of course!” Izuku nods vigorously, “I definitely will, All Might. I know you’ve been trying. I do, I just… I need help sometimes and you’re not always available. I’m sorry I told Sensei without asking.”

“No need for that, my Boy,” Toshinori smiles, “you didn’t do anything wrong. There’s nothing wrong with getting help with it, you just can’t… I have to remind you that you can’t tell him any of the secrets of One for All. I trust Aizawa, but it’s dangerous for too many people to know… I do hate to put that burden on you, but it sadly comes along with the Quirk.”

“I understand,” Izuku swallows, playing with his own fingers. There’s a lot he doesn’t know about his new Quirk, but he does trust All Might to tell him what he needs to know.

The pro smiles at him, almost sadly. Izuku returns a lighter one, and then they settle into a quiet conversation about how Izuku’s classes have been going, and stories about All Might’s Hero work.

Izuku leaves Recovery Girl’s office feeling lighter than he had in months. Sensei knew. All Might knew that Sensei knew, and wasn’t

mad. And Izuku would finally be getting help with his Quirk—well, when Sensei was better...

"We need to talk."

Izuku jerks up from where he's slouched over his journal at his bedroom desk, cocking his head at the ghost in his bedroom. He hadn't seen him since sending him away to be with Aizawa-Sensei, but his sudden presence and the stern words had a chill of fear crawling up his spine.

It's pretty late—Izuku had been thinking about heading to bed after working on the last few details he was adding to his book. He was exhausted from his visit with Recovery Girl, and the afterschool nap he'd taken in the infirmary hadn't really helped recharge his stamina. A good night's rest is what the old woman had cooed before sending him on his way with his fingers wrapped and his bruised forearm an interesting flourish of healing yellow-ish brown.

"W-we do?" Izuku swallows heavily, shutting his journal as he turns in the chair to give Oboro his full attention. "Is... is Sensei alright? He's not..." *dead*, Izuku can't force out, mouth drying at just the thought, "is he?"

"What?" Oboro looks confused for a second before his eyes widen and he shakes his head furiously, "no—I mean, *yes*, he's fine. Well, not fine, but he's... he's getting there? He's... he's still unconscious and... they're not sure when he'll wake up. He's been seen by a lot of doctors with healing Quirks, and RG stopped in a bit ago too... Sho's okay, don't worry. He'll.... He'll survive."

"Thank God," Izuku blows out a breath he hadn't known he was holding in. "You can't just scare me like that! I thought you were popping in here to tell me he'd *died*!"

Guilt clouds the ghost's face as he shrugs sheepishly, "sorry, Izu. He's really okay."

Izuku takes another couple seconds to swallow down the panic that had bubbled up, as well as to try and get his breathing under control before finally looking back up at the ghost.

He regards Oboro carefully, unsure, "if it's not about Sensei, then, then... what is it?"

That seemed to be all Oboro needed for the sheepish guilt to freeze back into the sternness from when Oboro had first appeared. “What the hell was that today?”

“W-what...?” Izuku blinks at the ghost. Oboro’s back in his school uniform. He’s got his arms crossed over his chest and a look of glaring uncertainty on his face. “What the hell was what? The villain attack? Why would I know anything about that?”

“Are you kidding me?” Oboro squawks, arms flapping in a way that matches the noise he’d made. Like a surprised bird. “No, not the villain attack! That whole thing with the clouds? That thing where my clouds were in the real world? That thing where *I* touched *you* like—like physically touched you? Do you know how *long* it’s been?? You were there for that—I know you were. I just—w-we—What the hell was *it*?”

“That all...” Izuku’s throat feels tight, “that really happened?”

“Yes!” Oboro snaps, eyes wide with disbelief, “I literally floated your classmates away on a cloud. I’ve never made so many clouds at once, Izuku—I mean, there was the one we were on, the ones your friends were on, the one hiding Sho, and the one keeping the villains trapped... I’ve never... it’s... it’s *impossible*, Izuku. I’m dead. You’re alive. My Quirk shouldn’t... I shouldn’t be able to... and, and— I’ve tried for years to touch people and I did—I touched you, I felt you!”

Oboro is almost in hysterics now, and Izuku can’t help but feel the same. There’s a sickening panic swirling in his stomach. He really had thought that he’d imagined it—or that he’s at some point taken a hit to the head. It was impossible.

“You used your clouds to rescue Tsuyu and Mineta...”

“That’s the part you focused on?” Oboro snorts, shooting a soft glare at the green-haired boy, “I did,” he furrows his eyebrows, “but I don’t know *how* I did!”

Izuku’s not sure what the ghost wants him to say.

“Okay, so... how’d you... why did... how’d it happen?”

“I. Don’t. *Know*. Do you even hear what I’m saying? I just told you I have no idea what the hell happened!” the ghost snarls, but there's no real heat in it. In fact, Oboro looks scared. Uncertain in the way he marches to Izuku’s bed and drops like deadweight onto the mattress.

“What did you do?”

“Me?” Izuku swirls in his desk chair to meet the ghost’s stern eyes, “what did I do? It was your Quirk! I can’t make clouds! I don’t even have a Quirk, Oboro! What do you mean what did *I* do? What did *you* do??”

“Ghosts can’t use their Quirk! I hardly even exist outside of you!” Oboro snapped, “don’t you think that if I *could’ve*, I *would’ve* already? I don’t have a physical form, I’m just... I don’t even know! I’m a soul, or a spirit, or whatever the hell ghosts actually *are*! You know, the first thing I tried to do when I realized I didn’t make it out alive was try to use my Quirk. And guess what? Didn’t work!”

“Okay!” Izuku forces out, straightening his back before he stands. He doesn’t even notice he’s pacing anxiously. “Okay. I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry. I’m just... what the hell is happening? I don’t even... one second I was about to die, and the next you’re there, and you’re touching me, and there’s clouds everywhere and I thought I imagined that and—and—”

“Hey, hey, wait a sec,” Oboro jumps up, anger from before melting into genuine concern.

Izuku’s hazy mind takes a second too long to realize he hadn’t been breathing, and it’s only when the ghost is at his side and has brushed a hand through his wrist that he draws in a sharp, stuttered breath, “take a breath, okay? Calm down, Izu, it’s okay.”

The lightheadedness alerts him that he’d slipped into a panic attack, but the cool chill of Oboro’s presence cools him down relatively fast. It’s obvious to the both of them that he hadn’t had a second to really think about the USJ, let alone decompress from it. He sucks in a couple deep breaths under Oboro’s careful instructions. He wishes he could hug Oboro. He wishes he could feel him again, just so he didn’t feel so alone.

They stand side by side for a moment. The ghost doesn’t make a move to try and touch him again, and out of the corner of his eye, Izuku can see him gnawing on his bottom lip. Oboro wants to reach out and touch him, but he hadn’t gotten the same results as he had in the USJ when he’d tried.

Izuku’s so confused. This is confusing. Everything is a *mess*, and he doesn’t know what to do with it.

“Are you alright now?” Oboro’s voice is so quiet Izuku almost doesn’t hear him. He turns his head to see the ghost watching him, frowning at him. His hand is outstretched, frozen in place like he’d been reaching to set a comforting hand on him again, only to stop abruptly when he remembered he couldn’t.

Izuku sucks in another breath before giving a shallow nod. “Yeah.”

“I’m sorry,” Oboro’s head ducks guiltily, slinking away from Izuku to collapse on the bed again, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to... to cause an attack. I’m just so confused. For years... I’ve been alone. I haven’t been able to touch anyone, and barely able to touch material objects... to touch *anything*. My Quirk was as good as gone... and then suddenly, with you, I can, and it’s there and I panicked because *how*—how is it possible? It’s not, but it happened anyways.”

“Let’s... let’s think about this rationally,” Izuku tells him, shuffling towards his bed to sit against the headboard. Oboro is stretched out along the foot of his bed. Izuku pulls his knees up to his chest and lets his arms wrap snugly around them.

Oboro’s head lulls in his direction, and Izuku frowns at the fond smile on his face, “you sounded so much Sho right there. That *Mister-Always-Rational* attitude.”

“I did not,” Izuku pouts, turning his head to the side in an attempt to hide his expression, “and it’s true. There’s no point in us talking over each other, we won’t figure anything out that way. Let’s just... lay it all out on the table. Maybe then we can figure *something* about this out.”

“Okay,” Oboro agrees.

“Tell me about your Quirk?” Izuku cocks his head, gaze now back on the ghost. Oboro is staring up at the ceiling, arms crossed over his chest and legs hanging off the edge of the bed.

The ghost’s head turns back towards Izuku, and then he sits up, pulling his legs up to sit crisscross on the bed. He’s quiet for another second, thoughtful like he’s trying to figure out how to explain it.

It’s probably been a while since he’d even thought about his Quirk, especially if he hadn’t been able to use it.

“It’s called Cloud, but I already told you that. I can create them, and manipulate them at will. They can be dense enough to shield people

from danger, and to withstand the weight of people and things on them, like us and your classmates, but they can also be used as distractions, like with the villains. I can alter the type of cloud and the density to suit whatever I need it for, but...” Oboro bites his bottom lip thoughtfully, “but I can’t usually make more than one or two, and it gets harder to control the more there are. I was... well, I was learning how to create a second cloud after the first when I... y’know.”

Izuku gives a slow knowing nod.

“One or two?” Izuku frowns, “but--”

“I know,” Oboro groans. “I know there were more than two at the USJ. That’s... I’ve never been able to do that. I told you, I panicked. You were like so close to having your face smashed in, in that villain with the decay Quirk was reaching for those two students, and Sho—he was... I *panicked*, okay? I told you I wasn’t sure I’d be able to manipulate and guide the clouds like I wanted, because I’d only been able have one-hundred percent control of a single cloud.”

Izuku’s head bows in another nod. That makes sense. But still, there had been five clouds total, all doing different jobs, of different densities, and he’d had to physically control three of them while keeping the other two completely steady—the one he and Oboro had been on going down, and the ones Mineta and Tsuyu had been on going sideways and down, all without disturbing Aizawa-Sensei's shield cloud, and the cloud keeping the villains confused and contained like a heavy fog.

“So, what’s different then?” Izuku mumbles into his knee, “what’s there now that wasn’t before?”

Oboro shoots him a dumbfounded look, “*you*, Izuku. You’re what’s changed.”

“Me?” Izuku blinks owlishly as the thought tries to make sense before he shakes his head, recoiling into himself more in disapproval. The boy squishes his mouth and nose into the gap between his knees before continuing, voice muffled, “there’s nothing special about me, Oboro. I don’t know what’s going on, but I doubt I have anything to do with it...”

“You see *ghosts*, Izuku,” the other teen stressed the word. “You see ghosts. You can see, and hear, and talk to us. I—I touched you, Izuku. I’ve never... I haven’t in so long, but I was desperate to get to you because... because I didn’t know what was going to happen, and I was

just reaching to reassure you that I was *there*, and I... I wasn't really *thinking*. And then my hand settled on your shoulder and... and it didn't phase through like it *always* does and I guess my Quirk activated?"

"You did touch me," Izuku agrees, head cocking to the side. "I remember that. You touched my shoulder and then my wrist. You pulled me back, right?" Those bits are a little hazy for Izuku. He remembers feeling the contact of it, but he didn't even register it until Oboro had tugged him away—after they were part way up on a cloud.

"Yeah, I..." Oboro bows his head, "I don't know. I just knew I had to get you away from that thing."

"You saved me," Izuku hums distantly. "You saved us all... thank you for... for saving my friends, and my Sensei and... and me."

Izuku's not sure how, but the ghost's face lights up in a faint blush. He ducks his head to hide his cheeks, clearing his throat, "no biggie, I'd've done it for anyone. I'm just... I'm glad you're all okay."

It's almost a funny thought that even in the afterlife, some heroes try to keep helping.

Oboro was a ghost, and he'd been the first one to follow Aizawa-Sensei into the fight, even though, technically, he wasn't much help without a physical form or a Quirk. He'd run himself into the ground using up all his energy to distract the villains, only to keep fighting—more intensely if that were even possible—when Izuku and his classmates showed up. He had one goal, and that was keeping them all safe. It was to be a hero.

"You're a hero," Izuku tells him softly, finally lifting his face from his knees to smile at his friend, "thank you."

"What kind of a Hero Course student would I be if I didn't go Plus Ultra?" The ghost teases, but there's a defeated sadness hidden in the way the smile twitches at the edges. He's clearly trying to hide it, so Izuku doesn't mention it.

The snort of laughter at the 'Plus Ultra' is completely involuntary from the green-haired teen, "y'know, if the uniform wasn't a complete give away that you were a Yuuei student, *that* definitely would've been."

"What can I say?" Oboro grins, and that sour curl of defeat had been wiped away from his expression, "Yuuei is practically in my blood at

this point."

Izuku lets out a good-natured laugh, letting his chin settle on his knee as he smiles. The mirth drains away, and the serious face of thoughtfulness is back at he mutters to himself. Oboro thinks briefly about tuning in and trying to decipher it, but Izuku's speaking in what sounds like tongues that only he seems to be able to process.

"How were you able to touch me?" Izuku asks softly, but when Oboro's glance settles back on the younger boy, ready to snap in annoyance once again that *he didn't know*, he notices the green-haired boy's gaze locked on the bedroom door across from him. Oboro's jaw snaps shut. A rhetorical question.

It's not even half a second later that Izuku's turning towards him, eyes dark with determination, "touch me."

"W-what?" Oboro swears his brain short circuits.

Izuku's hand reaches out between them, palm upwards like he's asking from a down-low high five. The hand is unwavering between them as Oboro hesitates. He'd drawn his hands up to his chest at the demand from Izuku, eyes flicking between Izuku's face, and the hand outstretched to him.

"I'll go through," Oboro whispers hoarsely. He's not sure why he'd afraid now. Phasing through Izuku hadn't bothered him before, but now it does. Now there'd been a time where he *hadn't* phased through him.

"You didn't at the USJ," Izuku reminds with a frown.

"I did when I tried to grab your wrist earlier," the ghost refutes with a heavy frown.

He'd been hoping that maybe... well, he didn't actually know what he'd really been hoping for. Maybe it was for whatever had happened in the USJ to have been permanent. That he'd be able to touch Izuku now—but that hopeful thought had been torn away when he'd almost stumbled to the ground after his hand fell right through Izuku's panic shaken form.

Izuku's lips move with silent mumbles for a moment before he's looking back up, determination still bright in his green gaze, "try again."

Oboro doesn't move, he feels frozen in place. His hands are interlocked together and pressed to his chest like Izuku's own hand will somehow burn through him if he touches him. Ironically, the opposite will happen he knows: it'll be cold, and Izuku will get the chill, not him. Still, he can't deny when Izuku's face softens and a gentle, almost inaudible, "please?" slips from the boy's mouth.

He lets his tense hands relax, untangling his fingers before inching closer. His hand hovers above Izuku's, a frown on his lips. He almost smiles despite himself as Izuku wiggles his fingers lightly, as if trying to prompt Oboro towards him.

The ghost blows out a breath before slowly dropping his hand.

It goes through.

Izuku doesn't so much as shiver at the chill Oboro knows is crawling up his arm, hand still outstretched and unwavering. It's Oboro who withdraws like the chill had shot up his arm instead of the uncomfortable tingle that was actually there. "I told you—"

"Again," Izuku's biting his lip, eyes narrowed down at his outstretched hand, "think about it, Oboro. Want it. We've touched before, and we can again. Think about... think about the USJ. What was different there? Why'd it happen then?"

The USJ?

He hadn't wanted it at the USJ; he'd desperately *needed* it. Shota, one of his best friends, was tipping between unconsciousness—walking the fine, *fine* line between surviving and death. The students were all in danger—that frog girl and the purple one. The villain was too close to them for comfort, would've used his Quirk on the girl is Shota hadn't of activated his Quirk.

And Izuku—God, Izuku. He'd been running towards him before he'd even realized he was. He'd needed to get to the boy who was caught in that monster's grasp. He couldn't leave him alone—desperately needed to be by his side, even if it was just to be with him as he'd... the ghost didn't even want to finish the thought.

They'd only known each other for a couple weeks, but it felt like they were brothers. Izuku was the only thing he had left, the only thing he'd had after so many years of isolation—

The green-haired boy gasped, the sound of it yanked Oboro away from

his own thoughts. His attention shot up to Izuku briefly before it was flying around the room, searching wildly for whatever caused the sound to bubble up from the boy's mouth. When he didn't notice anything out of a place, no sign of a threat, the ghost let his gaze settle completely on Izuku.

Izuku's gaze was downcast. Eyes wide and locked on something.

"Wha—" Oboro followed the teen's attention down, where he expected to see a bug or something on the mattress; something out of place that would warrant that intense look and the gasp of...

Shock.

Izuku's hand was... on his wrist. Izuku was holding his wrist. He couldn't really feel it—but he could see it. Nimble, scarred fingers tightening around something that wasn't even really there.

Oboro glares down at their hands—at Izuku's hand on him. Touching him.

He knows his jaw drops, eyes wide with the matching shock, and surprise and genuine excitement to Izuku's. They stare down for a while, both afraid to move.

"I'm touching you," Oboro whispers out brokenly. He *could* cry. He was touching Izuku—he couldn't feel it, but it was happening. It was happening before his eyes—they were touching. A living, breathing person was touching him, a ghost.

"Technically, I'm touching you," Izuku mutters in awe. "This is... it's..."

"Insane," Oboro breathes out. "I can't... I don't feel it. I did earlier at the USJ, but now—"

Almost as if provoked by Oboro's words, Izuku's hand falls through his own wrist, the boy's smaller body falling along with it and he barely catches himself on the mattress before toppling unsteadily off the bed. Oboro *wants* to cry now.

"I'm sorry," the ghost forces out, chest feeling heavy with sadness and... and something familiar that Oboro can't place.

"No, it's okay. You're tired," Izuku shakes his head, sending him a light smile. He's still in the position he'd landed in, and if Oboro

had've been a solid form, he'd have a lapful of Izuku. He doesn't feel Izuku phasing through him, nor does Izuku seem to feel the chill from literally being in the ghost's lap.

"I'm... tired?" Oboro repeated, cocking his head like the concept was foreign—and it was, he was a ghost. The last time he'd slept was thirteen years ago. Ghosts didn't sleep, he didn't have a body to recharge. Nothing about him needed rest, and when he'd tried, he'd just ended up sitting, or laying there with his eyes closed like an idiot. A long, thirteen-year battle with constant insomnia.

Izuku gave an affirming hum, "at the USJ, you used all your energy when you were helping Aizawa-Sensei with the villains. I noticed it. It stopping being effective past a certain point—like when you tried to stop the decay-Quirked villain from touching Sensei. He didn't even notice you—I doubt he even felt it, because I don't feel anything right now."

Oboro faintly remembers that. He'd been too desperate to really focus on the fact it wasn't effective, he just needed to be helping however he could—and that meant throwing himself through anything that got too close.

"But we just touched," Oboro mutters dumbly.

"And you were exhausted at the USJ when... when you used your Quirk." The boy adds as he bites his lip thoughtfully, worrying it between his teeth so hard that Oboro fears he'll split it open. "I'm not sure why it worked. Desperation, maybe? I was desperate to... uhm, well, to not die? And you were desperate to get to me... and to save everyone. It happened without either of us trying—we didn't even know it could happen..."

The younger teen shifted in his spot as he stared unseeingly passed Oboro; shoulders hunched as he mouthed words to himself. He didn't get carried away this time, and soon he was rejoining the conversation, "the USJ happened hours ago. Maybe you... I don't know. I don't want to use the word 'recharged' because you're not a cellphone, but maybe you did? Like... not enough to do it again, but enough to start up—y'know?"

"You're comparing me to a cellphone?" Oboro muses flatly.

"I'm bad at metaphors!" Izuku whines. "But it makes sense though! I mean, have you ever noticed how a smart phone will grasp at that last one-percent of its battery life? That's what you did at the USJ. You

used the remainder of your power, your, uhm, *power-saving mode*, to activate your Quirk. And then you've been, for lack of better words, and to go with the metaphor, *charging* since then. It must... it must take a lot of time to recuperate, for you to get your energy back..."

"You really are comparing me to a smartphone," Oboro snorts.

"Shush!" Izuku shoots him a soft glare, continuing on as if Oboro hadn't said anything at all, "we just used the rest of your energy—what little you regained from then, up until now. That's why we touched for a couple seconds but couldn't keep it going. Like... At the USJ, when you let go of me, everything disappeared. It was you ghost energy—your Quirk. When you physically weren't there anymore, neither was your Quirk affects."

"How do you know all this?" Oboro demands hesitantly, raising an eyebrow and blinking uncertainly at Izuku as he now starts to regain his composure and pull himself back up to a sitting position.

"I don't," Izuku snorts a laugh, "I'm theorizing. And analyzing. There's no way *too* know any of this. This is... I'm pretty sure this a pretty unique situation."

Neither say anything for a second before Izuku shakes his head and looks up at the ceiling in thought, "now the only question is, how'd you manage to manifest like that."

"Are you kidding me?" the living teen jerks his gaze back down to Oboro, where he sees the ghost giving him a look that's scarily similar to Sensei's tired glare. It makes Izuku want to shrink in on himself, but he also knows this is Oboro and not his kinda-scary Sensei. "You did it, Izuku. It was you."

"It couldn't have been!" Izuku protests, "I don't... how could I do that, Oboro?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that maybe, just *maybe*, this whole seeing ghosts thing could be a Quirk? I mean, look at what happened today! I used my Quirk through you. It didn't happen until I touched you, and don't even get me started on the fact I *touched* you! Twice!"

"No," Izuku frowns, "it hasn't. It's impossible. I'm Quirkless. Plus, I was born being able to see ghosts. It didn't just randomly start when I was four, or five—and, not to mention the fact I have an extra toe-joint, and am medically diagnosed Quirkless."

“You do realize mutation Quirks exist... righttt?”

Izuku’s thoughts stutter to a complete stop. A mutation Quirk? Him? That could explain the fact that he’d been seeing them as long as he could remember. Maybe it didn’t suddenly manifest when he was child because... because maybe it was already there. Could that really...

“I have an extra toe-joint,” Izuku’s protest comes out weak. “It was diagnosed... I saw the x-rays myself.”

“So, some medical *Quack* made a mistake.” Oboro tells him softly, but seriously, “misdiagnoses happen, Izu. He could’ve read ‘em wrong, or there could’ve been something faulty in the x-rays. Or maybe your Quirk, if it is a mutated one, could’ve messed with your toes. So little is known about mutation Quirks, it wouldn’t surprise me if you got misdiagnosed because of it; I don’t know—point is, *normal* people don’t see ghosts.”

“Normal people?” Izuku frowns. “Rude coming from the literal ghost.”

“The literal ghost only *you* can see,” Oboro teases, not even trying to look sheepish. “It’s the truth. You’ve had your Quirk this whole time and the USJ attack must’ve been an awakening of sorts. You’ve had the Quirk—it's seeing those who’re dead, but now we’ve seen that you can actually interact and use them. Use their Quirks!”

“I don’t want to use you,” Izuku pouts, “that makes me feel weird. *Using* someone. I don’t want to use someone...”

“Wrong choice of words,” Oboro tilts his head to shoot Izuku a light smile, “borrow then. You can borrow Quirks. And, well, technically I used you, I think? I mean, nothing happened until I touched you...”

“But did I prompt it? Like, did it happen because you touched me, or because I... I don’t know, because I wanted it to happen? Maybe the Quirk was active without me knowing... and, it’s gone both ways; you touched me at the USJ, but I touched you here.”

Oboro gapes like a fish, “uhm, I don’t... I don’t know?”

Izuku lets out a groan, “I have so many questions... and there’re so many tests we gotta run, well, after you’ve rested for a while, and, woah, I gotta like, record all this. I have a Quirk! You used my Quirk to use yours! Or... maybe I used my Quirk to use yours by using you as well...?”

“Stoppp! You’re making my brain hurt,” Oboro whined, tangling his fingers in his own gravity-defying locks and massaging at his head. Izuku lets out an honest laugh at the reaction, which prompts a glare from Oboro. “Thanks, ‘zuku, I ‘preciated the sympathy.”

“You don’t even really have a head,” Izuku teases, head cocking as he shoots what he knows is a shit-eating grin at his friend. “You’ve literally got no mass, Oboro.”

“I have a head!” Oboro squawks, tapping the top of his head smugly as if to prove his point. “See? Solid!”

“That doesn’t count, you don’t have a hand either!” Izuku’s full on cackling now, “a hand that doesn’t exist’ll be able to touch a head that doesn’t exist. They’re in the same dimension, or... something like that? I don’t know ghosts very well.”

“You’re mean,” Oboro pouts, but is silently pleased to see Izuku laughing. The ghost pouts for just a second before his expression turns smug, “don’t forget you can touch me too, Izu.”

The boy sputters, which prompts a laugh from the ghost, “forgot about that part huh? Guess I must exist!”

Izuku laughs again, but it’s softer and fond, “yeah, yeah. I’m sure you exist somewhere. Just... not usually here.”

“Unless you’re around,” Oboro shrugs, hands falling in his lap as he tilts his head to the side and shoots Izuku his squinty-grin.

“Unless I’m around,” the boy agrees with a fond half-smile. “For whatever reason.”

Izuku stared down at his Hero Analysis for the Future notebook, volume 13, where he’d been steadily making his way through his classmates interesting Quirks.

The page was turned to one of the first few analysis entries.

Shirakumo Oboro

Quirk: Cloud.

Hero Name: ??

Abilities: Able to generate and manipulate clouds. Can control density of

the clouds, and the cloud type. Clouds can be used as shields, transportation, and as a distraction/ trap depending on the density. Clouds can withstand human weight amongst other things such as debris. Unsure of the weight limit. Cloud quantity is undetermined. Additional information to be added.

Off to the side of the page was a detailed drawing of Oboro in the costume from the USJ. He'd added as much detail as he could remember, wracking his brain for those little, easily missed things. It looks good, he thinks. He's sure he's missed something, because he'd only actually looked at the hero costume for a couple seconds between the panic of everything, but it looks decent.

Izuku lulls back in his chair, gaze settling on Oboro, who was hunched over his laptop on the bed, completely engrossed in a YouTube rabbit hole, where he'd somehow ended up on baking videos. Izuku was a bit afraid of what his homepage was going to look like after this. Especially since Oboro will watch anything that comes up, instead of skimming the suggested videos on the side.

His gaze lingers on Oboro, eyes taking in the details of his face. He turns back to his hero costume sketch, erasing his hair and redrawing it so it was more... cloud like. He added a couple more details before nodding to himself.

The green-haired teen paused for a second before turning to the next available page.

Midoriya Izuku

Quirk: Ghost? To be determined.

Hero Name: Deku.

Abilities: To be determined.

"Hey, no!" Oboro grumbled behind him, "the button's back! Izu, come click it. It was—no! *Thirty seconds*?! There's *two* ads??"

"It'll go away after the ads are finished," Izuku snorts, like he hadn't already told Oboro that multiple times—whenever an ad comes up at least. He feels his chest vibrate as he laughs fondly at the ghost. Despite the laugh, and promise that it would go away on its own, the teen pushes away from the desk with a light smile.

"But the cupcakes...!"

Izuku is really not expecting Aizawa-Sensei to stroll stiffly into the classroom on Thursday morning. It had only been two days since the USJ attack, and as far as Izuku heard, from Oboro, Aizawa-Sensei had only just woken up in the hospital yesterday evening.

The ghost had been completely ecstatic when he'd appeared behind Izuku in the kitchen. Over the past two days since the USJ attack, Oboro had been hanging around more. He'd periodically disappear to the hospital for a couple hours before returning.

"He's awake!" He'd grinned, smiling wider than he usually did. Izuku couldn't help but wonder if it hurt to smile that big. "He's finally up!"

"Were you there when he woke up?" Izuku turned to face the ghost, smiling widely, but it wasn't even close to Oboro's.

"Nope," the ghost deflated slightly, before perking up again, "but that's okay, because he wasn't alone. All that matters is that he's awake, and he's doing well! Still looks like shit, but he's alive!"

"I'm glad he's alright," Izuku smiled softly, pleased to see Oboro so excited. He was glad his teacher was okay. Izuku still didn't completely trust him, and he was still a bit afraid of him, but he'd hated the fact Sensei had been injured so seriously. The thought of it had made his stomach queasy, so he was relieved to hear he'd woken up.

Oboro had left again right after sharing the good news—but Izuku was just glad his friend had kept good on his word of being his messenger.

After the USJ attack, the school had given all the students a day off to recuperate, and Izuku's class had been given an additional day to decompress from the incident so early in their schooling. Thursday morning brought Izuku excited to return. It had been too quiet at the apartment over the two-day break. He hadn't seen his mother, and Oboro had been bouncing between the hospital and the apartment.

It comes as a shock when the door slides open, and Izuku's attention lifts from his notebook only to see Sensei stumbling in. His steps are slow, and his arms and face are wrapped almost completely in bandages.

"S-Sensei?" Izuku jerks up, but hovers beside his desk uncertainly. He wants to go help him, but he has a feeling Sensei would snap at him if he tried. "A-are you alright?"

“I’m fine,” the bandages wrinkle as he speaks. He sounds relatively the same; maybe just a little more tired than usual. Honestly, if you weren’t looking at him, couldn’t see the bandages, he’d sound perfectly fine.

Behind Sensei, Izuku spots Oboro who looks incredibly annoyed. He’s glaring daggers at Sensei’s back, arms crossed over his chest as he steps after the man.

“Should you…” Izuku bites his lip, knowing he shouldn’t question his Sensei. The question of *‘Should you be back so soon?’* dies on his lips.

“No,” Oboro snaps after regarding Izuku for a slow second, like he’d just realized he was there too at the half question, “no certainly he should not be here! Stupid idiot never listens. Thinks he’s Goddamn invincible or somethin’! You had your brains bashed in just *two* days ago, you woke up *yesterday*— take a me day, Shota!”

Izuku blinks in the raging ghost’s direction before he looks towards his teacher again. He can almost see Sensei’s eyes peeking out from behind the bandages, and it feels like he’s… watching Izuku. Studying him behind the cover of his bandages. He’s not sure if he actually is, of if Izuku’s just being irrational.

Still, if Sensei can see him, he’s probably wondering why Izuku’s staring at the side of his desk instead of looking at him.

“Should I what, Problem Child?”

“Nothing!” Izuku squeaks, ducking his head in a quick bow that he lingers in, “I uhm, it’s really nothing, Sensei. Just… I’m really glad you’re okay. I was… I was wondering if you were, but no one said anything, and then I, well, we all had the last two days off because it was a bit stressful so soon in the year, but… you, uhm, you really didn’t look too good, and we were worried and—”

“Problem Child?” Sensei’s low, but calm voice promptly cuts off Izuku’s ramblings.

He draws in a nervous breath, finally lifting his head from the bow and letting his attention shift to his teacher, “y-yes, Sensei?”

“Slow down.” It’s a quiet demand. Soft, even. Sensei leans back against the edge of his desk, body angled towards Izuku. He has to be able to see, right? “Breathe a second. I’m okay. I’m sorry no one told you students that Thirteen and I were alright, I imagine that was

suspenseful.”

Izuku swallows, ducking his head in a hesitant nod. “I was worried, Sensei.”

“I’m okay,” the man repeats offhandedly, but there’s some underlying softness. “How are you doing, Midoriya?”

“I’m okay!” The teen promises, “I uhm, I kinda hurt myself a little but it’s all better now. Recover Girl took care of it.” He knows better than to lie to Aizawa-Sensei. For all he knows, Sensei had already talked to Recovery Girl, and knows exactly what Izuku had visited her regarding injuries. “There’s some bruising still, but it’s... it’s healing well!”

“Will the bruising deter our training session tomorrow morning?”

“O-our... Sensei, you’re hurt! We—we shouldn’t—that’s—”

“I can still use my Quirk,” the man tuts, “if you think we’re going to be starting with combat, you’re sorely mistaken, Problem Child. Your Quirk is new— not just to me, but to you as well. We both need to get a feel of it, and I can do that even with these bandages. So, are you alright to train tomorrow, or not?”

“Of course!” Izuku gives a firm nod, ignoring the way Oboro seethes at Aizawa-Sensei's side. He’s muttering to himself, but Izuku’s too far to understand what he’s saying.

“Good,” Sensei hums. “Now, let’s go.”

“G-go?” Izuku frowns, quirking his head as he grabs his journal and backpack to follow his teacher, who’d turned swiftly and marched towards the door like he wasn’t more bandage than skin.

“It’s Thursday. You’re going to meet HoundDog, and you’re going to have your first session before classes start. It’s non-negotiable, considering the USJ attack and everything I know you saw.”

“B-but—” Izuku shoots Oboro a pleading look. The blue-haired teen shrugs with a frown, gesturing Izuku to follow Aizawa-Sensei down the hall as he turns to make his way to Mic-Sensei's class. He’s still radiating annoyance at the teacher as he turns to leave, but Izuku hopes he’ll calm down a bit after some time apart from Sensei. Hopefully.

“Non-negotiable,” Sensei interrupts calmly as he leads a trailing Izuku along. “Relax, Midoriya, it’s not just you. The entire class will be having a check-in throughout the next few days. You just have the luxury of going first since HoundDog’s already cleared his morning schedule on the days you asked for.”

Izuku’s silent as he follows. He’s defeated. He doesn’t really want to talk about it yet, but he will if Sensei wants him too. And maybe it won’t be awful to talk with someone he doesn’t have to worry about judging him. Counsellors don’t judge, do they?

“It’s for your best interest, Kid,” Sensei mutters softly as they walk, “no shame in needing a bit of help sorting yourself out. We all do sometimes, especially after something traumatic. You students have the option of guided help, and HoundDog is one of the best counsellors around. I urge you, like I will to your peers as well, to take advantage of it.”

“Do you see a counsellor, Sensei?” Izuku asks meekly, clutching his notebook to his chest. He’s caught up to Sensei’s significantly slowed steps, falling into step beside him.

The man regards him cautiously for a second before he looks forwards again, “I do, Kid.”

Well... if Sensei does, then Izuku will try as well.

Chapter End Notes

There we go! I wrote some All Might. I'm sorry if he's OOC, I literally had no idea how to write him. I'm usually semi-good at being able to get into the heads of characters, but I just have no idea what to do for All Might. But I didn't want him to be a bad guy because his relationship with Izuku is pretty cute. As dumb as it sounds, I like Toshinori, but I still dunno what I think about All Might (even tho they're the same person lmao).

Anyways! I hope you guys liked Izuku and Oboro trying to figure their shit out, and I hope the direction I took this is alright! It's what I had planned from the beginning, but some of your guys' suggestions are amazing! I was so tempted to alter this, but decided to see how it plays out like I'd originally planned.

Thanks once again for reading, and leaving comments and kudos! I love to see what you guys think about it, your suggestons and your guesses about what's coming next! Also feel free to comment

prompts you want to see, and I'll try to make them happen! I've got a few I'm working in, but I'm happy to have more!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> I'm back again! I had a lot of fun with this chapter! Hopefully it turned out alright, because I'm not sure? I like it, so I hope you guys do too!
>
> Also, I'll probably be pushing back the Sports Festival because I want to work on bonds and stuff before that. It'll probably take place around the fifth week of school, and everything else'll be pushed back as well. Sorry!
>
> Now, without further ado, enjoy the new update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seeing HoundDog wasn't as bad as Izuku was expecting it to be.

As promised, Sensei had introduced the two of them after walking Izuku down to the counselling office. He hadn't exactly been soft as he'd gestured to the man with one of his bandaged arms, the one on the side Izuku wasn't standing by, with nothing more than a tired hum of: "HoundDog," as an introduction. He'd then proceeded to look towards Izuku, nodding in his direction before lulling his head back towards HoundDog, "Midoriya Izuku."

The introductions could've used some work. Izuku was still nervous, but his Sensei had done as promised. Thankfully, Izuku was sure the man would get more practice as he'd be doing introductions with HoundDog at least eighteen more times as he managed to corner and persuade his classmates like he'd done to Izuku.

"Good morning, Midoriya," HoundDog had greeted with a light smile, "you're welcome to call me HoundDog, or Ryo-Sensei if you'd prefer. Do you have a preference of what you'd like me to call you?"

"Midoriya is fine," Izuku shrugs nervously at Sensei's side, "or... or Izuku, I don't mind."

"Midoriya it is then," the man gave a nod, "I've already been briefed on your newly manifested Quirk by Eraserhead. We'll talk more of that amongst other things this session, but I'd really just like to focus on getting to know you today, unless, of course, you've got an agenda for us, which is fine too." HoundDog flashes a grin behind his muzzle,

before glancing at Aizawa-Sensei. They share a brief second of eye contact and then HoundDog is gesturing Izuku into the room invitingly, “I’ll take it from here, Eraser. Why don’t you come on in, Midoriya. Have a seat wherever you’d like.”

Without meaning too, Izuku shots a cautious, uncertain look to the side at his homeroom teacher, almost shrinking in on himself when he barely catches his teacher’s eyes on him. They’re hidden away behind the bandages, hardly seen in the slit of missing bandages to give him his eyesight back, but Izuku catches a glimpse of them.

He’s not entirely sure why he’d done it—why he’d looked over for support from the man, but he had. He just knows his cheeks are slowly starting to glow with embarrassment, so he’s ducking into the room just seconds after realizing what he’d done.

Izuku throws an awkward wave in his teacher’s direction, eyes still locked on the floor in embarrassment, so he doesn’t see his Sensei’s face or eyes. He doesn’t see a reaction, if there even is one at all.

“Thank you for walking me down, Sensei,” Izuku mumbles out before turning swiftly and fully entering the room.

HoundDog lingers outside the doorway a second long, no doubt talking to Sensei—probably about him—but Izuku just pretends they’re not. He just sits stiffly on the loveseat couch across from the armchair and waits.

Since Izuku didn’t have an agenda coming into the session, hadn’t really wanted to come to begin with, HoundDog leads it. He gets to know Izuku, as much as the boy’s willing to share.

The first talk about his new Quirk. Izuku tells HoundDog the basics of it without revealing too much of the secret. They draw up a rough draft together of what his Quirk counselling will look like, and decide that Tuesdays will focus on his Quirk, while Thursdays was a more general check-in. But the man still makes sure to stress that Izuku can come to him with any problems at any time, and the gesture is appreciated.

He knows he won’t, but it’s nice to have the option.

After the Quirk talk, they swiftly transition into homelife talk.

The teen talks a bit about his family, at HoundDog’s suggestion, knowing he can’t be too honest or else he’ll have more problems to

deal with. Besides he doesn't want to bother his mother with this, so he keeps his answers clipped and to the point. He hopes he keeps his voice natural, but he's not sure how observant HoundDog truly is.

Izuku explains how his mother works long hours to provide, and how his father is in America. How he hadn't seen him in over ten years because he hadn't gotten a Quirk (he doesn't share *that* part though), but *'it really doesn't bother me, HoundDog-Sensei! My mom and I are doing just fine on our own!'*, and maybe he'd stretched the truth a bit, but in the end, what does it really matter?

He doesn't let them linger on the topic for long, silently afraid he'll let something unsavory slip, instead swiftly turning the conversation onto the friends he'd made thus far. Now *them*, he's happy to talk about them.

He talks of Iida, and Ochako who he'd met on that first day, as well as all the other classmates he'd actually talked too and considered to be his friends; like Kirishima, Kaminari and Asui to name a couple. He talks about his other classmates too, because he's got nothing against them, just hasn't really gotten a chance to really meet them yet.

It's HoundDog who brings up Kacchan, the one classmate Izuku hadn't mentioned. The teen has a feeling that HoundDog knows more than he's letting on, probably from Sensei, or maybe even Kacchan who'd already had a couple sessions with HoundDog; Izuku knows that's entirely Sensei's doing, just like Izuku's own counsellor visit right now. It's nice to know that Sensei had kept his word.

HoundDog doesn't object when Izuku tiptoes around the topic of Kacchan like he had talking about his family, and the teen's silently grateful the Pro is leaving him to slowly hazard his way through this session at his own will. They don't talk about anything Izuku doesn't want too, and it's honestly a weight off his chest.

He doesn't feel forced into anything, and the look on HoundDog's face makes him feel comfortable to not talk about things yet, so he doesn't force himself too.

Instead, Izuku offers up another topic.

Oboro. His best friend outside of school.

HoundDog doesn't bat an eye at his deflection when it comes to talking about Kacchan, and just follows Izuku into the next topic of conversation.

HoundDog seems interested in Izuku's friend, though the teen refuses to give a name or any personal details about the ghost—though he doesn't honestly know much. Still, Oboro was a student here. He doesn't know when, but he knows he definitely was, and he's not sure if HoundDog would know him. So, he keeps it broad.

The student speaks highly of Oboro, sharing what few stories they have after just under three weeks of even knowing each other. He tells the Pro how funny the ghost is, and how well they get along. How Oboro is always coming over to his place, and how he often walks home with Izuku—well, he tells him they meet at the train station because Oboro isn't technically a student here, and it might raise red flags if the counsellor starts looking into the fact someone who isn't a student is leaving campus with him.

"I'm glad to hear you have such a close friend, Midoriya," the Pro gives a light smile when Izuku finishes rambling about the ghost. The teen gives an enthusiastic nod, grinning widely as he thinks of his friend.

They talk a little bit of the USJ incident too, and it's the one topic HoundDog doesn't seem to budge on. Up until that point, he hadn't minded Izuku skirting around things he didn't want to talk about yet, but the counsellor isn't as willing to let Izuku brush the USJ off.

Again, he doesn't force anything, but he does keep returning to it when Izuku trails off.

It's not that he doesn't want to talk about it—he does, he's just now sure how to talk about it without really talking about it. He and his ghost friend had touched, and together they'd used Izuku's newest (oldest?) Quirk in order to use Oboro's own Cloud Quirk in the real world which was very, very impossible.

There is one thing Izuku doesn't mind talking about though, "I thought he was going to die... He just... that thing, the monster, it didn't let up on him, and w-we saw it hurting him, but we couldn't... there wasn't anything we could do. He'd told us to leave before... but it felt—it felt *wrong*."

"You students did the right thing staying back," HoundDog tells him softly, "there wasn't a lot anyone could've done. Aizawa did what he had to do to ensure your, and your classmates, safety. We all would've done the same had we been in his shoes. He doesn't regret it, Midoriya. We'd all go the extra mile if it meant keeping you students

safe. I'm sure Aizawa would do it all over again in a heartbeat if it meant keeping you all safe."

"Does he really like us that much?" Izuku's nose scrunches up. He's never seemed overly fond of them. Glaring from the front of the room, and calling them idiots. Lecturing them and being generally *done* with them before class has even really started.

Izuku knows he'd seen Sensei putting his life on the line for them. He'd watched just out of sight as it happened, but he's still the same man who'd threatened to expel him on the first day of classes. He'd been planning on actually expelling him too, if what Oboro had said was true.

"Aizawa is a kind man," HoundDog explains slowly after a second of thought. "He's rough around the edges, a bit blunt at times and a little... harsh, but he's a good teacher. He's a good man, and a good Hero. He'll do everything in his power to help you lot thrive in his class, even if that means working you to the bone. He cares... just in his own way. I won't put words into his mouth and say he *likes* you guys, but I will day he doesn't *dislike* his class."

There's another pause, hardly a second before HoundDog shakes his head with a nervous laugh, "you didn't hear any of that from me though. He likes his reputation of being a heartless and unrelenting man, and he's pretty scary still, even if he's got a good heart. This stays between us, yeah?"

Izuku can't help the laugh that bubbles up from his lungs and he nods.

"I cannot believe him!"

Izuku has to keep his eyes locked down on the paper before him. It's getting harder and harder to not look up.

"Stupid idiot; gets his face pounded into the ground, wakes up from a stupid two-day coma and comes into school the next frickin' day!" Oboro is quite obviously annoyed, having not budged from the position he'd been in when Izuku had arrived that morning after his counselling session. "I mean, substitutes exist for a reason!"

The ghost's arms had been crossed tautly across his chest with his hands pinned in his armpits. His face had been curled in a scowl that much resembled Sensei's own. It's a surprising look on Oboro's face, considering that Izuku's used to seeing wide smiles and teasing smirks.

He knows Oboro's annoyance hadn't subsided at all as class started.

"Alright!" Present Mic's voice calls in Izuku's attention, "compound words, yo. Ya take two words, put 'em together and you get a new word with a new meaning. There are three different kinds of compound words, ya'dig?

"The first is a closed Compound word. These words are written as a single word, like haircut and newspaper.

"The second is open Compounds. These ones are written as separate words. High school. Living room.

"And the last is hyphenated Compounds. These are words that use a hyphen in between two words, like well-known and second-rate."

Present Mic pauses, and the only sound to be heard is the student scribbling what he's said down (and Oboro snarling softly in annoyance that only Izuku can hear). It'll no doubt be on the exam in the year.

"Alllright, Listeners. I've written two words on the board, anyone wanna take a shot at making a compound word?"

Izuku's gaze settled on the board where the two words 'up' and 'make' had been written. He cocks his head at them, putting the two together first as 'upmake', in the order they'd been written, before shaking his head and trying 'makeup'.

No one raised their hands, but Mic-Sensei didn't seem deterred. He just smiled lightly, "no prob, Listeners. I'll tell ya what? Let's take a closer look at these two words first, before we start pushin' 'em together, ya'dig? Up. Who knows what up means?"

This time, a couple hands raised.

"Kaminiari!" Mic-Sensei called on him.

"Uhm, up, like, up in the sky? Looking up?" The blonde-haired boy furrowed his brow, looked up for a second before pointing up towards the ceiling uncertainly. It prompted some giggles from the class, but Mic-Sensei looked pleased.

"Yep!" he praised, "right-o. Up like up in the sky. The direction. Good job. Now, what about make? Any guesses?"

“I mean, seriously, one day off won’t kill him. For a guy who likes sleep to the point he carries around a stupid sleeping bag and will sleep wherever he *can*, why the hell does he avoid actual rest so much? Why make sucha big fuss about it??” Izuku can’t help but let his attention drift back towards Oboro. He’s sat at Mic-Sensei's desk, feet kicked up on the desktop, leaned back with the same scowl from early still etched on his face. He’s not looking at Izuku, instead looking at Mic-Sensei, who’s still up in front of the chalk board teaching them.

“Bakugou!” Mic-Sensei called out, and Izuku forced his attention back to the board.

“Make somethin’,” Kacchan huffed, holding his own hand up where his Quirk fizzled through his palm, “I make explosions, that Extra—” Kacchan gestures vaguely in Yaoyorozu’s direction, “—makes a buncha different shit. Creating something.”

“Correct, but please watch your language in class, ya’dig, Listener?”

“Yeah, whatever,” Kacchan huffs, and it’s about as scolded as Izuku’s sure the teen has ever sounded. There’s hardly any fight in his voice.

Mic flashes him a smile, pleased with the response, even if it’s not the kind he’s used to getting when reprimanding students. They all know that’s about as nice as Kacchan gets, so he’ll take it as it is, “so we know that up means something above. Something overhead, that you need to look up at. And make means something you create with other things. Now, anyone wanna try the compound word made with the two of them?”

“I can’t believe no one stopped him—I mean, c’mon, ‘zashi, you saw him! The guy looks like death *incarnate*. Someone should’ve told him he couldn’t come in. He’s scary, but he’s not that scary. Grow some balls and tell ‘im to go home! Take his Yuuei ID card so he can’t come in. This’ll be a Shota free zone until he’s had at least one day of rest! Why’m I the only one concerned?!”

“Makeup?” Jirou’s voice drags Izuku from his thoughts, he shoots his attention away from where Oboro is still mumbling angrily to the teacher who doesn’t even know he’s there.

“Right!” Mic grins from the board, turning swiftly to write the compound word beneath the two separated words. When he’s done, he turns back to the class, “anyone wanna take a stab at what it means?”

“I can’t believe Nezu let him come in looking like that, I mean, he looks like he walked out of an Egyptian tomb. He’s more bandage than man! Nezu should’ve—” A pause, as Oboro’s face pinches in thought, “wait a second, that stupid *rat* probably made him come in!”

And Izuku chokes on a snort of laughter that he tried to contain. He’d just called principal Nezu a *stupid rat*. “Sorry!” Izuku yelps, hands coming up to cover his mouth as embarrassment floods his face.

“Shit, I’m sorry, Izu. I uh, I forgot you could, uhm, hear me?” Oboro looks apologetic, leaning towards the student with a frown.

Izuku wants to wave him off, it was an honest mistake after all, but he really can’t with everyone’s attention suddenly on him.

“S-sorry, Mic-Sensei, I uhm...” *I didn’t mean to laugh aloud; the ghost just called our school principal a stupid rat*. No, not a good excuse. That one’s about as believable as ‘the dog ate my homework’.

“Don’t worry about it, Listener!” Mic tilts his head softly, “while you’re talking though, any idea what our new compound word means?”

Izuku lets his eyes flick from Present Mic, to the board, then back to his teacher. He bites his lip, “uhm, makeup, like... to make something up? Like, uhm, for example, a make-up test? ‘I missed our test, so I came in after school for a *make-up*?’”

“Almost, Listener,” Mic gives him a light smile, “though you are right, and that is proper use of make-up, with a hyphen, which is a compound word, the compound word we’re looking at right now is a makeup without a space or hyphen. You’ve got your compound types a bit mixed up, so you’re skipping ahead of us, Listener! Wanna try again?”

Izuku shakes his head to the point his bangs fall over his eyes. Present Mic doesn’t seem bothered, just turns back towards the class with a loud prompt of: “Anyone else wanna take a shot at it?”

“Uh, what about *makeup*, like, what you put on your face?” Kirishima suggests with a shrug. “The lipstick and the... uh, the powder stuff? That black eye pencil?”

“Yes!” Mic cheers, “perfect. And what kinda compound is that?”

There's a dull murmur as everyone answers at once, a few people are

wrong, but the majority respond with: “Closed Compound.”

“Yes, yes, yes!” Mic grins, “and what kind of compound was Midoriya’s example?”

“Hyphenated?” there’s more caution in that round of guesses, and the whole class does not answer. But enough of them do that Mic’s happy.

“Perfect!” He turns back to the board not to write out both Izuku’s and Kirishima’s examples, followed by the type of compound they are. “You Lil’ Listeners are so smart! I’m so proud! Now we’ve covered two of three compound types, anyone wanna attempt the last?”

It’s Yaoyorozu who raises her hand, but instead of calling on her, Mic-Sensei just points enthusiastically in her direction, “make up, like, ‘do you want Chamomile tea or Earl Grey? *Make up* your mind.’ It’s an open Compound.”

“Right you are,” Mic laughs, turning to add Yaoyorozu's addition to the board. “Now you have a basic understanding, yo. I’ve got a handout for you kiddos to work on for the rest of this class. It’ll be homework if you don’t finish it, due at the start of class tomorrow. Lemme know if you need any help! Now, Class Rep, Deputy Rep, help me hand these out?”

Iida and Yaoyorozu stand to collect the papers from the podium to pass out, while Mic-Sensei makes his way to his desk. Oboro lets out a yelp, just barely managing to get out of the chair before Mic-Sensei sits on him. Izuku keeps that snort of laughter to himself as he quietly thanks Iida, who’d set a paper on his desk.

Oboro stalks towards Izuku with a frown, pulling himself up to sit on the side of Izuku’s desk. “I’m sorry again, Izu. I think I have a ranting problem, but usually no one cares, because no one ever hears... I’m just so upset, I mean, why is he even back? Can no one talk that idiot into some simple self-care?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Izuku hums softly, hoping his words are hidden away by the scratches of his pencil. "I’m surprised he’s back too, but he seems... alright, I mean, not physically yet, of course, but, uhm, mentally...”

“That stubborn asshole,” Oboro huffs. “Anyways, need any help with that?”

“No.” Izuku shoots the sheepish ghost a quick glare.

“Worth a shot,” Oboro grins as he leans back. His palms press into the back edge of Izuku’s desk as he kicks his feet up onto the back of Izuku’s chair. The student just lets out a light huff of annoyance through his nose as the ghost shoots him a grin.

“Just... hold your hand out,” Izuku prompts with a sigh. His own hand is held out too, hand raised like he’s expecting a high-five. His palm is facing Oboro, who is glaring down at his own hand.

They’d been trying to touch again since school had ended.

“It’s not a skill if we both have to be emotional messes for it to work,” Izuku had huffed out as he unlocked the apartment door, “I can’t rely on being overcome by emotions to use this Quirk. You can’t either. That’s how people get hurt. I need to be able to conjure this Quirk— you— without having my judgment clouded by emotions.”

“But we’ve only used it when we were emotional,” Oboro reminds as he plops down on the couch. “I could only do it when I was scared. Back at the USJ, and again in your room when I was *thinking* of the USJ. Both times I barely even know what was happening.”

“I know,” Izuku hums, “but we do know what’s happening now. And that’s what practice is for. We have to try to expand on this. Right now, it’s emotion related or... or so we believe. But if we practice—if we get to know it, and use it when we’re not desperate... I don’t know, maybe we’ll be able to broaden the limitations.”

“Do you really think that’ll work?” Oboro quirks an eyebrow, “I mean, I’d love to be able to use my Quirk without feeling like I’m dying all over again due to panic and desperation.”

Izuku ignores the twinge of regret for his friend as he nods slowly, “it’s worth a shot.”

And that how they ended up here. Sitting facing each other on the couch in the living room. They’ve tried four times, thus far, to touch. And each time, Oboro’s hand had slipped right through Izuku’s.

They’re starting easy— with hands. Well, fingers really, but they’ll take whatever they can get. The theory behind it was that if they were both trying, using the same body part, palms, then maybe they’d be able to make it work.

They hadn’t had much success when randomly touching, like at

school, when Oboro's finger had phased through Izuku's head when he attempted to flick his forehead, or when Izuku had accidentally elbowed through Oboro when he'd been working on math homework at lunch.

"Why am I getting the feeling that this isn't gonna work," Oboro frowned, hand hovering just an inch or so away from Izuku's, hand in the same open palm position.

"Fifth times the charm," Izuku lifted a shoulder in a halfhearted shrug.

"I thought the third and fourth times were the charm," Oboro snarked back, but there wasn't any heat behind it. Just defeat.

Izuku shot the ghost a look of annoyance. Oboro rolled his eyes, letting out a heavy sigh before extending his arm the rest of the way so his palm lined up with Izuku's own. He hesitated just a half second before finally going the last bit of distance.

Where his hand went through Izuku's hand.

"See?" Oboro frowned, "we're definitely missing something."

"I don't know what," Izuku shook his head, frown heavy with both defeat and annoyance, "you've had Quirk training and counselling, what're we missing?"

"That was years ago!" Oboro squawked.

"Yeah, well," Izuku snorted a laugh, "you're better off knowing than I am, I didn't have either. What do you remember?"

"Right," the ghost sucks in a breath, puckering his lips as he tries to think back to those first couple Quirk counselling sessions he'd had when his Quirk manifested. A cheerful little four-year-old Oboro with a small, fluttery cloud trailing after him like a pet on a leash.

That was a good twenty-six years ago at this point.

"To be honest, most of us had the problem of using our Quirk right off the bat. The counselling was to help us control it, not to help access it —well, I mean we did that too, but the first major milestone was being able to cap your Quirk. We're all just so excited and it's just... it's like second nature to use it? They teach us to keep it contained, to have control over when and when not to use it. I'm not... I don't know what to do when the Quirk won't work. It's the opposite..."

“Second nature,” the seems to be the part Izuku singled in on. He hums the word thoughtfully to himself, thumb catching under his chin while his pointer finger rubs along the dip of his chin thoughtfully. Then, he’s muttering. Oboro has gotten used to this since befriending the teen, but it still makes him snicker every time he sees it happen.

How does someone get so far into their own head that they lose sight of literally everything.

It was better to just let Izuku run his brain instead of interrupt him. Especially when he was so focused on their current problem.

“My Quirk already is second nature,” Izuku finally blinks out of the trance, “it’s always been there. I’ve always seen you guys. I’ve spent most of my life ignoring this, my Quirk, since it’s not... well, generally acceptable? I’ve never stopped seeing ghosts, knew I never would, but maybe... maybe all this time I’ve been capping the true potential. I didn’t want something else that would make me different so I... walled it off.”

“You’ve been capping it all this time?” Oboro worried his bottom lip between his teeth, “so how’d you use it at the USJ?”

“I... and, this is just a guess, I don’t think I was in the right state of might to keep it up,” Izuku shook his head, “I mean, I did almost die. And Sensei was badly injured, and that villain was going for Asui and Minoru. I think that... the second that wall crumbled, you had access to the Quirk. And a part of you, subconscious or instinctual, I don’t know, *something* in you took the opportunity to use my Quirk to your advantage.”

“If that’s the case, it’s a good thing you’ve kept it capped,” Oboro’s eyes widened in horror, “I don’t even know how I did it, I was moving before I knew what was happening... but I had full control of my Quirk and it was... more powerful than it’s ever been... what if it had’ve been a villain to harness the power of your Quirk instead of me?”

Izuku bites his lip. The thought had crossed his mind just seconds ago as well. If it opened a link to Oboro, who’s to say it didn’t open a link to any other ghosts milling around. He hadn’t seen any, but then again, he can hardly differentiate living people from dead people. Any of those villains could’ve been a ghost.

He’s quick to relax his jaw when he faintly tastes metal on his tongue, “I don’t *think* that would happen,” he offers slowly, frowning

thoughtfully as his gaze lulls towards Oboro, “I can’t be sure, of course, but I know I’ve been emotional around ghosts before, and nothing’s ever... *used* me. Used my Quirk. I think I have some control over it, I just... didn’t know it?”

“So, how’d I use it then?”

Izuku wrinkles his nose, “I trust you, dummy. I think there was... a level of consent that neither of us noticed. Like... subconsciously. You reacted before you knew what you were doing, and I... I didn’t know what was happening until after the fact, but I trusted you so... maybe that’s how you were able to access my Quirk?”

“That, uh, that kinda makes sense, I guess?” Oboro’s cocks his head to the side as he attempts to understand, before his mouth drops open and he blows out a small little exhale of ‘oh’, followed by an enthusiastically fond, “I trust you too, ‘zuku!”

The shorter of the two shakes his head with a roll of his eyes. “Now I just have to figure out how I managed to open the connection... if I’m right, my Quirk is always restricted subconsciously. But how... how do I open it when I want and or need too?”

“Well,” Oboro sucked his teeth, “why’d you need it in the first place?”

Izuku’s mind instantly settled on *mom*. He’d decided when he was little that he wasn’t going to burden anyone else with his power. She hadn’t liked it. It scared her. It’s what had drove a wedge between his parent’s marriage first, and then drove another between him and his father before finishing off with a third between him and his mother.

The Quirkless thing had played a part in it too, but they all knew what really destroyed their bonds.

Things that people didn’t understand scared them—he'd scared them.

So, he’d stopped bringing it up. Stopped talking about it, and acknowledging it when he wasn’t inclined too. Izuku thinks that’s when he really built up the wall. Cornering the piece of himself that people didn’t like—that he’d been taught to be scared of.

“I don’t know,” he whispers out despite his thoughts. Despite the way the lie rolls off his tongue, Izuku’s lost in his thoughts. If that’s when he started bottling the parts of his Quirk that made weren’t constant up, that’s where he needed to put himself to open it. “Let’s... let’s try again. I wanna try something.”

“Are you okay?”

When Izuku looks towards his friend, Oboro’s eyebrows are furrowed in concern, and his lips are curled in a light frown. He’s studying Izuku, and the green-haired teen isn’t sure what Oboro sees in his expression that would make him look like that.

“’course,” Izuku forces a laugh that wavers towards the end. He clears his throat, swallowing down the wince before holding his hand out, “you said you trust me, right? So, trust me.”

Oboro eyes him for just a second before blowing out a breath and reaching his own hand out. It stalls right in front of Izuku’s, and it takes a few long seconds for Izuku to realize the ghost is giving him all his faith—which includes being the one to close the distance between their hands.

Izuku digs deep into himself as he heaves a breath. He struggles to locate that childhood fear that had been instilled in his head by his mother and father. Conversations in passing he shouldn’t have heard, and things that had been said in the heat of the moment. Supposedly innocent things that had struck right through Izuku’s heart. Things he’d held onto, tools he’s used to lock away what no one had liked about him.

‘Normal children don’t see ghosts, Inko.’

‘It’s a faze! He’ll grow out of it!’

‘Maybe… maybe don’t talk about your imaginary friends, alright, sweetheart? You know how people talk…’

‘They’re not real, Izuku! You need to let this go now! I’m so tired of this! Grow up!’

‘It’s weird! ***He’s*** *weird! He’ll never be a normal child, Inko! Now the brat doesn’t even have a Quirk either! He’s a lost cause!’*

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut. *You’re okay. You’re okay. This is okay. They’re okay. There’s nothing wrong with you. Don’t be afraid. You’re okay. Let it go. It’s okay.* He’s not sure when he closes the gap between their hands—he hadn’t even registered moving.

But he feels Oboro’s hand against his suddenly. Flat against his palm, pressing back just as hard as Izuku is. He feels him. It worked. He’d really accessed it…

The green-haired teen forces his eyes open, letting out a surprised breath he hadn't known he'd been holding in. Oboro is staring down at their hands in awe, fingers trembling as they each lift cautiously from Izuku's fingers only to press back like he's trying to tap them.

"You did it," Oboro's voice is watery, "you... wow. Izuku, you're incredible!"

"Make a cloud," Izuku doesn't tear his gaze from their fingers. In fact, he drops his fingers into the gap between Oboro's own fingers just to make sure they don't jump apart like they had at the USJ. They'd worked too hard for it all to be lost by nothing more than any slight shift that could separate their hands.

Oboro follows suit, fingers slowly dropping over Izuku's and it's only then that Izuku lifts his gaze from their hands.

When Izuku looks back up at his friend's face, all he can do is follow his gaze upwards.

There, settled just below the ceiling in Izuku's apartment, is a small, fluffy white cloud.

"It worked..."

"Yeah, Izu," Oboro laughs softly, staring up at his cloud before looking back at the teen with a wide, toothy grin, "it totally did."

"Look around you," Aizawa-Sensei's monotone voice directed.

Izuku did as told, blinking around at the gym they'd arrived in. He hadn't known what he'd been expecting for their first private lesson, but it certainly wasn't this. The room was large and spacious, but filling it, was dozens of pillars of what looked like concrete. They stood tall, some thicker than others, but all sturdy and well-constructed.

"This is Gym Gamma," Sensei told him sharply. "I asked Cementoss to build this training ground for you. I don't know what you're capable of right now; your Quirk is new and powerful, and frankly not something I'm comfortable having you test to your full potential around your peers just yet. There are far too many unknowns about it, and it's just not a risk I'm will to take quite yet when neither of us know what you're capable of."

Izuku swallows thickly, nodding slowly. His gaze flickers over the pillars once more, frowning in thought.

“There’s only one goal for you today. You’re going to use your Quirk to destroy each and every one of these pillars. You’re free to do it however you see fit. Destroy them. Knock them down. Crumble them. Go Plus Ultra. Whatever gets the job done.”

Aizawa-Sensei's gaze scans up Izuku calculatingly before he’s looking back out over the course, “you have half an hour, which is generous, to knock them all over. Anything goes. Now, should you fail to complete the task in the allotted time, you’ll be doing twenty suicide drills at the start of our Sunday training session.”

Izuku narrowed his eyes at his teacher in surprise, eyebrows furrowing. He could do whatever he wanted to destroy them? Anything? He knows One for All is completely capable of doing so—if it could take out multiple floors in the battle simulations then it could certainl—

“However,” Sensei drawls, and Izuku’s attention whips back to him, “there’s a catch. I don’t want to see any major injuries. No broken arms, no broken legs. We’re done as soon as I deem you injured. In addition, that be an automatic disqualification since you won’t be finishing.”

Izuku’s mouth opened to refute that because he’d hardly been able to use his Quirk without some kind of injury, but his teacher holds out a silencing hand before he can, “I know. Though I’d love to see you come out of this unscathed, I know you’re unable to use your Quirk without taking damage as of now, so in consideration to that, I’ll overlook broken fingers.”

Izuku knows he’s gaping. Sensei is giving him permission to...

Sensei paused in his words, eyeing Izuku sharply through the gap in his bandages, almost as if reading his mind, “obviously don’t injure yourself if you can help it, but I’m well away setting a strict restriction will give you a disadvantage with your Quirk. That would be illogical. Use it how you know how. Today is about gaging your potential. Seeing what you can do; your strengths, weaknesses and limitations.”

Izuku nods slowly, blinking at his teacher owlishly.

He can almost see the annoyed scowl he’s sure is on his Sensei’s face as the man continues with a distraught sigh, “I’ve seen you perform

with broken fingers, and as much as I hate the thought, it's only fair to let you do this exercise as you have been thus far. You get five fingers to do with as you please; hit six and you're finished."

There's another pause that drags on for far too long in Izuku's opinion before his teacher is speaking again, "the bottom-line is, you get half an hour to destroy each and every concrete pillar in this gym. I can and will stop training should I deem it necessary. This training session will end if you break an arm, leg or if you break more than five fingers. Major injuries are an automatic disqualification, and you will be doing suicide drills as a consequence for it, just like if you fail to complete the task. Ready?"

"Damn," Oboro let out a low whistle, "good luck, Izu."

Izuku glances briefly at his ghost friend who's sitting against the wall by the door they'd just come in through, "I promise I won't get in your way. I'll just be here cheering you on."

Izuku frowns at him before looking back at his teacher, "yes, Sensei."

"Good," the man hums out gruffly. "I'll be watching. Your time starts now, Problem Child. Go."

Izuku heaved a breath before launching himself out towards the center of the gym. He feels One for All coursing through his veins as he leaps against pillars speedily to get a layout of the gym. There's about... fifty pillars. All spread across the expanse of the huge training gym.

They're too spread out for Izuku to rely on a Smash to complete the exercise. Not that he could, since a Smash would render him useless—injured, which was an automatic disqualification. It didn't matter if the Smash knocked them all down in one hit, he'd still fail if he hurt himself.

Izuku lands on one of the centermost pillars, surveying over his surroundings. He sees both Sensei and Oboro just as he'd left them; can almost feel Sensei's gaze burning into his back. It's different having his teacher's attention solely on him; usually his gaze is nothing more than a glance before carrying on to study his classmates. He tries not to feel nervous under Sensei's observation.

Izuku's first course of action is to use his flick attack.

It had worked well during the USJ attack, and he knew it was

powerful enough to do some damage here, but he also knew it would hardly do half as much damage as it had. Concrete didn't work like water. Water was easily manipulated, whereas concrete could absorb his force.

Sure, it would crumble, but unlike water, the more concrete his attack passes through, the less effective it gets for residing or distant pillars.

Still, it's his best attack, and the one he's sure will do the most damage to the course considering his guidelines.

Izuku launches off of the pillar he'd been standing on, aiming his flick like he's looking through a rifle scope. He aims for one towards the center, close, but far enough away that he won't get caught in the rubble.

The teen supports his wrist with his non-dominant hand to ensure he doesn't accidentally break his wrist before finally flicking. When he'd done it back at the USJ, the added support of his second hand had made for a stiff pain in his wrist instead of a solid break, so he hopes it holds up again.

The power courses over the pillars as it's released from his finger.

They rumble as they fall, crumbling down to nothing. Dust collects as Izuku lands gracefully just out of reach of the settling debris.

The pillars towards the back, furthest away, are cracked and breaking apart in big chunks, unlike the ones that were hit first, which are nothing more than rubble. He can faintly see the cement wall of the gym cracked, but still intact. It was nothing more than surface damage though.

His pointer finger aches, and his thumb isn't much better. The bruising is already an irritated purple colour. It hurts, but all he can do is squeeze his wrist in an attempt to numb the pain and keep going. The pain of broken fingers is almost familiar at this point, as sad as that sounds.

Izuku is pleased after his second survey of the fallen pillars; his attack had knocked out a decent ¼ of them. But it also took two of Izuku's limited five fingers. It was a good strategy—a good start, but he couldn't do it again. He can't aim without his thumb, and now that he has the damage, he's not sure he wants to bust anymore of his fingers.

He needs to think of an alternative.

Izuku wonders if this was what Sensei had planned with the activity. He wouldn't put it passed the man. It was clever really, teaching Izuku in a way he has to almost teach himself. Sensei had offered nothing more that guidelines and rules—a motivating punishment. It's almost a game.

A game Izuku desperately doesn't want to fail. He needs to adapt if he wants to avoid suicide sprints. They were hell. And... well, there's a small part of him that wants to finish Sensei's game for no means other than to impress his standoffish teacher. Sensei sees potential in him, one of the few adults in his life to do so, so he's going to make damn sure he lives up to the man's expectations.

Izuku climbs back up onto one of the center pillars, squeezing his injured fingers into a fist as he rubs at his wrist. The adrenaline of using his Quirk has almost entirely cancelled out the pain, but he knows it's there.

He's honestly not sure what to do nest. The flick had been his big move—or the biggest move he could do without being disqualified.

The teen relaxes his fingers, fanning them out to glance over the damage. That had been 100% of One for All. Using 100% would not get him out of this. He couldn't just give one good hit and have it all be done like with the Zero-Pointer, and what he'd attempted to do with the Nomu.

Maybe... he needs to use some of his Quirk. Some of it.

What had All Might meant when they talked on the beach?

The egg in the microwave. He needed to cook the egg, but not explode it.

He'd been trying to use 5% of One for All. And it still hurt, but it didn't completely harm him like using full cowling would. It was close, and he's sure if he used it excessively, he'd end up hurt and Sensei would call this off but...

What if he used 1%?

Just enough power so he's not a fifteen-year-old scrawny kid punching a cement pillar. The question is, would 1% be enough? He could just as easily break his knuckles on the cement as an ordinary teen. He'd never been one to punch things prior to his Quirk, but he'd seen people fracture their hands punching walls and faces—Quirks

nowhere to be seen.

Honestly, it could go either way. He could either find a compromise, or take himself out of the running without even really using One for All.

But he knows he can't just stand around. Not when Sensei is studying him from afar, no doubt nitpicking everything he's done. He's too far for Izuku to make out his expression—especially with the bandages covering his features, but he'd felt his teacher's stern glance on him this whole time.

Izuku looks out at the sea of cement, shaking himself from his thoughts as he looks down at the pillar he's stood on. He spreads his feet, clenching his hand into a fist, where he activates his Quirk. It's hard to harness just 1% of something that could be so powerful, but he thinks he manages.

He blows out a breath, blinks his eyes shut for just a second before forcing his eyes open to glare down at the pillow. He narrows his eyes before dropping a punch to the top of the pillar.

Pain blooms in his knuckles, but it's definitely not a break. It's impact irritation. He's quick to flex his fingers again, before wobbling and jumping to the side off the crumbling pillar.

It worked.

The pillar isn't as destroyed as the ones from the flick attack, but it's slowly crumbling.

And he's not hurt.

Izuku doesn't have much time to be happy he'd managed to use some of his Quirk without harming himself, because time is ticking down still. A half an hour isn't really a long time when you think about it.

He makes quick work of running through the gym, punching the bases of the pillars. The air is more concrete dust than anything, and he's been tripping over destroyed pieces of pillar as he moves, but he'd been steadily making progress.

Not nearly as fast as he had with the flick, but progress was progress.

He made it through a good half of what was left before he felt the pain of his knuckles pulsing through the adrenaline. They weren't

broken still, but they were bleeding. He'd broken the skin, and he knows that a couple more hits will break him. This is his body warning him. *Stop before you're stopped.*

He forces in a ragged breath, wiping the blood coating his knuckles onto the pants of his gym uniform. He's so glad he has a spare in his locker, because he's not sure what his friends would think if he showed up in bloody clothes.

"Midoriya," Sensei calls from the door. He hadn't moved still, but Izuku could see him. "Status?"

"Nothing's broken!" Izuku winced at the way his voice rose higher, "just... some blood. But I'm okay!"

There's a lingering of contemplative silence. Izuku fears that Sensei will deem him injured and he'll have to accept defeat, but his Sensei really does like surprising him, doesn't he?

"You have ten minutes left."

"Woohoo!" Oboro cheers from behind Sensei's stiff form, "you got this! C'mon, Izuku! Stick it to the man! Show him what you can do!"

It is a very good thing Sensei can't see Izuku rolling his eyes at Oboro's antics. He'd hate to have to explain why he was rolling his eyes when it was technically just the two of them in the gym. He'd die if Sensei thought he was rolling them at him.

Izuku forces his thoughts back onto his task.

He can't use his hands anymore in fear they'll break. He could, of course, try to use his non-dominant hand, which is currently damage free, but that's iffy. If he moves wrong, it could all be over. He's not ambidextrous, but he knows he could use his opposite hand in a pinch.

This isn't a pinch. It's not worth the risk of breaking his arm because he's unused to fighting with it.

He should stick to what he knows. What he's seen. His fists. Like he's watched All Might do for years. Like he'd ben stumbling his way through like a fawn learning to stand. He fights with his fists.

But... he can't.

He can't risk putting any more pressure onto his dominant hand either.

What does that leave?

…

His feet.

He'd never really thought of using his feet in the heat of training, or battles. All Might had always used his fists. Punching was easy; kicking was less so. He didn't have spectacular balance. And he'd never tried to direct One for All down.

But he should.

His feet were unharmed right now. He could kick well enough.

Plus, it was his only option right now.

Use his feet or face defeat.

So, he does.

He's not agile—nothing like Aizawa-Sensei. He'd seen the man glide gracefully through the air, taking out villains and landing with perfect ease. It was beyond impressive. Maybe he can practice some hand-to-hand combat with the man during another session. Or start studying some kind of martial arts...

Izuku launches into a wobbly kick. He forces One for All through his body and down to his foot. One for All is tipping between 1% and 2% and he just prays this turns out like he wants instead of breaking his foot.

He feels his foot make contact with the pillar. He feels the burst of his Quirk as it shoots through his foot as it consumes the pillar. He doesn't hear a crack of bones snapping, or feel that blossoming pain.

It's crumbling when he forces his attention put from his seemingly unharmed foot. It's crumbling and falling, and it worked! He'd used his foot! He could *kick* with One for All!

Cheers fill the room, but Izuku instantly knows it's not Sensei.

Izuku glances back at the cheering where he sees Oboro stood straight up. He's got that squinty-eyed grin on his face, arms stretched over his

head. His arms bend over his shoulders and his fist are hidden behind his head, “you’re doing amazing, Sweetie!”

Izuku regrets ever letting Oboro watch old meme compilations.

He huffs out a laugh before getting back to his task.

He’s almost done.

The pillar numbers are slowly dwindling down. He makes quick work of kicking the base of the pillars. Each pillar cracks at his impact and slowly caves over. He’s really doing it.

By the time he kicks the last pillar standing, the one in the center he’d used as his vantage point, he’s tired. One for All flickers before he manages to power it down. The exhaustion from training hits him like a bus.

He’s sore.

His fingers ache as the adrenaline of finishing his task wears off, and his knuckles throb. His hand is covered in dried blood, but he doesn’t care because he’d done it. He’d played Sensei’s game, and he’d won!

He takes another second to assess himself before he kneels and palms at his foot. The top of it aches from smacking into concrete, but besides that and his hand and fingers, he’s uninjured.

“You managed it.”

Izuku jumps in surprise at the voice, attention shooting up to where Sensei is standing over his shoulder, assessing him for injuries. His gaze lingers on the broken fingers and knuckle wounds before his eyes drop to where Izuku’s still pressing against the top of his shoe to alleviate the impact pains.

“Anything broken?”

“Two fingers,” Izuku tells him proudly, and wait—is that a flicker of a smile behind Sensei’s bandages? It’s gone so fast he thinks it was just his brain playing tricks on him. “Everything is just impact irritation.”

“Show me,” Sensei hums out, though Izuku can’t help but think he almost looks impressed.

He does, fanning his fingers out so his teacher can actually assess his injuries. Sensei’s eyes trail up his arms, lingering on old scars and

injuries that he'd gotten both from junior high, as well as trying to learn One for All by himself.

"And your foot?"

Izuku blinks before taking off his shoe and sock. The top of his foot is bruised like you wouldn't believe, but he wiggles toes, and rotates his ankle before bending his foot to prove it's not actually broken.

Sensei seems content with it, giving a faint nod.

"So, did you learn anything?"

"I can kick!" Izuku chirps as he slips his sock and shoe back on before standing up. "I'd never thought of it before—but it worked really well! It still hurts, but I think I just need a support item like steel-toe shoes or something else padded; then I'd be able to alternate between my fists and my feet."

"You did well, Problem Child. You exceeded my expectations." Sensei tells him as they walk back towards the door side by side. Oboro is still grinning like an idiot stood by the door. "You made good progress today, far better than I've seen you make in class. You were able to alter your strategy as the activity progressed. It's promising. Are you still afraid?"

"Yes," Izuku answers honestly because he is. It's powerful, and he's just now learning the tip of the iceberg. There's so much more to this Quirk. "But I'm getting more confident with it. Thank you, Sensei."

"Don't thank me," his teacher huffs out. "We'll keep working until you feel confident in your Quirk. It's a logical fear to have given how late your Quirk manifested and how little supported practice you have, but it's not going to help you. Don't let fear control you."

Don't let fear control you.

Izuku sucks in a breath as he thinks back to the evening prior. He'd realized that yesterday, when he'd sat facing his ghost friend. He'd forced himself to relax, taking shots in the dark of how to open up a connection he hadn't even known he was pushing down.

He'd realized it yesterday on his own but... it was different hearing it from Sensei. It was different coming from someone else; someone he was slowly starting to trust. It sounded like good advice now, instead of a desperate attempt to make something happen.

“Don’t let fear control me...” Izuku repeated under his breath. “Alright.”

He knows his Sensei hears him mutter to himself by how he shifts slightly as they walk, but he doesn’t mention it. They arrive at the door, pausing as Izuku grabs his school bag and hesitates while his ghost friend falls into step beside him, a wide smirk on the ghost’s lips.

A smirk he desperately wants to question.

Instead, Izuku looks on at the mess of fallen concrete. He silently feels back for making such a mess, but Sensei doesn’t seem fazed.

“I did it.” It just hits him now as he looks out. He’d done it. He’d finished Sensei’s game. They were all knocked over. Some crumbled to bits, and other laying in chunks. Nothing is left standing but him.

“You did it,” Sensei gives a nod that could almost be pride, “congratulations, Problem Child. You managed to knock all the pillars down without taking substantial damage to your body. In just over thirty-two minutes.”

Yes! He’d done it. No damage taken (or... no more than allowed at least). No pillar left standing. And he’d done it all in just over thirty-tw—

“Thirty-two minutes?!” Izuku sputters. “I *failed?*”

Oboro is chortling behind him, bent in half as he laughs. He had half a mind to swing around and backhand him. Would he be able to channel his Quirk through his irritation? Was that a strong enough emotion to let lose like at the USJ?

Izuku think he even hears Sensei muffle a chuckle into the bandages covering his face, and his capture scarf too, but he’s not completely sure through his defeated misery. He’d failed.

“Cheer up, Problem Child,” his teacher hums out, tone almost *teasing*, “it’s only twenty suicide sprints.”

Izuku just groans as the ghost at his side starts *cackling*.

“Now, off you go. Recovery Girl is expecting you. Don’t expect her to fix you up completely, just the broken fingers, got it? No more relying on the old lady to heal every self-inflicted injury.”

“Yes, Sensei,” Izuku sighs, looking up at his teacher with a light smile.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies if the English lesson is butchered, 12+ years of English class, and being a native speaker of it, and I still goof it up more often than not. English is awful to learn; I have serious respect for those learning English as a second language!

Anyways! I hope you guys liked this update! I had a lot of fun with it!

Thanks for reading! Comments greatly appreciated, and as always, feel free to leave suggestions of things you wanna see and I'll try to make it happen! Thanks for all the support, and for taking the time to read this!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Heyo! I'm back again :)

Guys we hit 10k hits on this! That's wild, it's only been a little over a month (I think?)! Thank you so much for all the love you guys are showing this! I really didn't think it would be as liked as it is, but thank you!!

I hope you're excited because things are gonna get a bit angsty in this chapter! It's a bit shorter then I thought it was going to be, but I decided to split this chapter into two because I think it'll flow better. Also, check out the end notes if you could!

Anywho! Please enjoy :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku shows up to English class that morning with his thumb and pointer finger wrapped in bandages and splinted. Recover Girl had healed the shattered bones, but had insisted on adding that last little bit of support while his body continued to mend together. She hadn't done anything more than tut at the bruises and knuckles wounds she insisted he show her, leaving them to heal naturally like Sensei had insisted.

Then, she'd urged him to take a power nap before classes started and dropped a handful of nutrient gummies into his still sleep drowsy hand before ushering him out ten minutes before the bell that alerted them of class starting.

Izuku wonders if that's why his training session had only lasted a little under forty-five minutes between being informed of the rules, and actually completing the task. Sensei had said Quirk training sessions would be an hour at least when they'd sat down to arrange the schedule, but today it hadn't.

Had his intention been to send him to Recovery Girl to be taken care of?

Was it just Sensei's way of ensuring he had ample time to recover and be ready for classes despite the injuries he was sure Izuku would leave Gym Gamma with?

Had he really planned that far ahead?

Had he really been that mindful, and cautious? Giving Izuku a time limit for his Quirk training activity that would make sure he had the time he needed to be ready for the day? Izuku assumed his teacher didn't want him missing class time, but it still felt odd that he'd put so much thought and preparation into the training session. Seeing it from all angles, and predicting outcomes and planning appropriately for each different outcome.

He doesn't let himself think about it too long, because before he knows it, he's already sitting in English, and Mic-Sensei is spinning away from the chalk board with a wide grin, the new concept they'll be learning scrawled in white chalk behind him.

Oboro had been late coming to class, probably staying behind with Sensei who'd been in Gym Gamma the last time Izuku had seen him. Oboro hadn't followed him down to the infirmary. Izuku wonders how the mess of concrete was going to be cleaned up, but he assumes it'll be taken care of the same way it was built, using Cementoss' Quirk.

The ghost shoots him a smile in greeting but settles at Mic-Sensei's desk instead of perching on the edge of Izuku's. That's not weird in itself, but the fact that Oboro is near silent definitely is.

Oboro seems to just watch as Sensei teaches. He's not really listening, just... studying the man. He probably knows this lesson already; he's said before that he's come to a lot of Present Mic and Aizawa-Sensei's classes.

Why does he keep coming if he already knows what's being taught? Why spend his time here? Izuku knows that Oboro is connected to their teachers, he's made it clear, but why keep coming to school. Why keep repeating the same thing day after day? Maybe even year after year?

Izuku's thoughts come to a stop as his hand freezes where it's jotting down an answer to a question on the worksheet in front of him. He really doesn't remember getting it—had Iida passed it to him, or had Sensei? And when did he start filling it out? What even *was* this?

Izuku can't help but let his thoughts stray from the paper again, glance lifting to the ghost perched at the teacher's desk at the front of the room.

He really doesn't know a lot about the ghost.

He's let this ghost use his Quirk, but he knows very little about him. Honestly, what does he actually know?

He knows he's dead.

But that's a given. Oboro is a ghost. Ghosts are usually dead. That doesn't really count as something Izuku really knows about him. It's fact.

He knows he's close to Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic-Sensei.

But he doesn't know how. Why. Why is this ghost following his school teachers around? Why is Oboro so keen on them? So invested in them? Why does he sit through this class every single day when he's not learning anything, and Sensei can't even see him?

Izuku definitely wouldn't want to follow any of his teachers around if he was a ghost.

It just raises more questions.

Why?

Who the hell is this ghost?

He's obviously a student here... or, he *was* a student here. The uniform is a giveaway, but Oboro definitely has the spirit and attitude to be a Hero Course student—and he's got a good Quirk to boot. He gave little regard for himself before launching into battle alongside Sensei, and throwing himself in the crossfire when it came to Izuku and his peers versus the Decay-Quirked villain. He had that same drive of *'my feet just started moving on their own'*.

But what else does he really know?

He knows Oboro's Quirk just from seeing it.

He knows the Quirk because Oboro had been compelled to tell him about it. That had been the only conversation where he'd actually gotten solid answers from the ghost, and that was just because they were both too desperate to figure out what the hell happened to really think about what they were doing and sharing.

But that... that's all he knows.

He's a ghost, he'd died at some point, he's close to his two specific teachers (again: how? Why?), and he's got a cloud Quirk that he

wouldn't have told him about if it hadn't come up like it had—quite *literally*. Izuku's not sure Oboro would've said a thing about his Quirk if he hadn't witnessed the clouds himself.

Then there's...

...

There's *nothing* else he can think of.

He knows nothing else about this ghost.

And in contrast, there's so little Oboro *doesn't* know about him.

Oboro's seen where he lives—he's been in his home. He's watched his TV, and used his computer. They'd eaten together (or, Izuku had eaten and Oboro had pouted while whining about his inability to eat). He'd been in Izuku's room, seen the frankly kinda embarrassing All Might décor he's collected since his toddler years—had hidden a laugh at said décor into his fist before telling Izuku it was cute (*rude!*).

Oboro knows his deepest, most guarded secrets. He knew of One for All, and he knows more of what Kacchan had done to him than anyone else. He'd seen Izuku at his worst after those battle simulations, stuck by his side through it, and he'd even shared the prideful and joyous sentiment when they'd first really used his newfound *old* Quirk without being overcome with intense emotions.

Oboro's *used* his Quirk. Izuku had trusted Oboro enough to let him into himself. He'd like the ghost in, allowed him access to his Quirk. The first ghost to ever get that sorta trust from him. The first to ever befriend him, like more than just friendly greetings and conversation in passing. They were *friends*.

Oboro has gotten closer to Izuku than anyone had since he was diagnosed as Quirkless, but the favor definitely hadn't been returned. Izuku had let this ghost of a teenage boy who'd died who knows when, who knows how, into his life, and he hadn't gotten the same thing back.

If Izuku was an open book, Oboro was a padlocked diary.

And he understood that Oboro probably had reason to keep his secrets guarded. He understood that maybe it was hard for the happy-go-lucky ghost to recall his old life, to think about what he'd been like before dying. Death was hard. He didn't know how it had happened,

but it was probably traumatic—death usually was.

Izuku couldn't even begin to imagine being a ghost. Being able to do nothing more than follow loved ones around. Not to be seen, or heard. Hardly even there, but also there completely.

Izuku understood. He got it, but he still couldn't help the nagging voice in the back of his head telling him it wasn't fair. This ghost knew so much about him. He followed him around, came to his home. He knew his secrets, and had been his voice of reason a few times in their short friendship, but he never gave back what he was taking.

Oboro told him nothing—and even when he'd tried to ask, just an innocent question about if Sensei and Present Mic were friends, he'd been shut down. Oboro had stepped around the question entirely. He'd led him along without really giving him an answer.

If he wouldn't answer a question like that, one that wasn't even *about* him, there's no way he'd answer a question about himself. Plus, was it considered rude to ask questions like that to a ghost? Would it stir up bad memories?

As curious as he was, and as desperate as he was for *something* to balance the scales a little, he still didn't want to ask anything that could hurt the ghost.

He'd never want to intentionally ask something that would upset his friend. But what was considered upsetting questions? There was no online how-to or ancient guide book to talking to ghost friends about themselves. Izuku was pretty sure this was a problem that was entirely his own.

It just... it wasn't fair.

Didn't seem fair that Oboro knew so much about him, but kept himself so mysterious.

Izuku bites the inside of his cheek, forcing his attention back onto the lesson being taught.

He's behind now—doesn't even remember what's been taught thus far. What had the original lesson been? What were all those examples on the board?

All he knows is what's written on the board now, is not what had been there before. How many times had Mic-Sensei erased and written new

notes? And he hadn't even finished his work sheet yet.

Izuku blinks, frowning down at his work. The half-finished worksheet and the nearly empty page of notes. Yikes.

When he looks up towards his teacher and the board again in an attempt to try and brute force his way through the lesson, he catches Sensei's gaze for just a second. The teacher frowns lightly, cocks his head to the side in a silent, hardly noticeable gesture of question before going back to his teaching.

He knows.

Had he been that obviously lost in thought? Caught not listening; not even paying attention in the slightest by his Sensei? That was a glance of knowing from Mic-Sensei. Had his teacher really caught on to the fact he was so spaced out he didn't even notice forty-minutes had passed in class?

And had he noticed, but not attempted to call Izuku's attention back? To remind him to focus? He'd just... let him...?

Izuku's not sure what his teacher sees on his face when the man catches his own gaze for a second time and—damnit, he'd zoned out again, hadn't he? The board's been updated, and nothing makes any *sense* to Izuku anymore.

His teacher's frown had deepened for a second after that brief moment of eye contact, the second time, not the first, before that bright smile is back on his face and he's addressing the whole class again.

He's honestly glad he doesn't get called out for it. That's something his previous teachers had always done, and it always fueled his tormentors. *Stupid Deku wanting to get into Yuuei when he couldn't even focus in class? Yeah right!*

Kacchan had always been the worst for throwing those thoughtful spells of inattention back at him.

He brushes off the thought after a glance over at Kacchan. The older teen's gaze is on the board, sitting slack in his chair. He's writing down the notes, paying attention, even if he does look completely board with his fist holding his head up. He's not paying Izuku any mind, and it's a weight off the green-haired teen's shoulders.

Kacchan had changed a lot since the start of the year, hardly paying

Izuku any attention anymore.

For the rest of class, Izuku tries to catch himself up—but it's a lost cause considering he doesn't really know what he'd missed. How much had Mic-Sensei taught when he'd had his head up in the clouds thinking about his ghost friend?

"Midoriya?" Sensei's voice breaks him from his thoughts. The teen looks up from his anxious scrawl of the notes he'd caught at the end of class, only to notice the room emptying—had the bell rung already? He forces his attention up to where Present Mic is looking at him, that little frown from earlier back on his face, "can we have a word before you head out, Lil' Listener?"

He gives a nod, because who is he to deny a teacher asking to speak with him?

He'd expected this. He'd been ignoring the lesson, lost in his own head. Of course, his teacher would have something to say about it. They always do.

He was behind now—his notes making zero sense because he'd missed half of them. And the assignment his classmates were setting down in a pile on Sensei's podium was hardly even started.

He was definitely in trouble.

But at least he was in trouble after his classmates were gone.

Izuku packs up his desk and stands slowly, half completed assignment clutched to his chest as he makes his way towards Mic-Sensei. Ochako had paused in the doorway, shooting him a look, which he'd waved off. He didn't want her to be late for math class too, and he really didn't want her watching him get chewed out for spacing out when he was supposed to be paying attention.

He shuffles his feet, shooting Oboro a look that the ghost frowns heavily at. There's a hesitance, and uncertain glimmer in the ghost's eye as he stiffens up. Had he noticed Izuku's inattention too? He hadn't said anything either. He'd almost forgotten the ghost was in the room at all, too consumed by his own thoughts and the pit of bubbling uncertainty in his stomach.

Still, the look Izuku shoots him has the ghost leaving the classroom as well; lingering for just a second before poofing away. He's not sure where he goes, but he's glad he left. He doesn't want to be lectured in

front of any of his friends. Alive or ghost.

“Are you okay, Listener?”

Izuku’s attention jolts up to where his teacher is leaning against the edge of the podium—right beside where everyone had set their assignments.

It’s not what he’s expecting. Concern? Where was the irritation? The annoyance?

“Uhm...” is the only thing Izuku can manage out.

“I just noticed you haven’t been paying much attention in class today, and I was wondering if you were alright? Did something happen? I know you... you were working with Aizawa this morning, right? Did something happen then?”

He gives a slow nod—and he’s not sure whether it’s conformation that he’d worked that morning with Aizawa-Sensei, or agreement that he’d been dissociating in class. It takes a moment for his brain to catch up to the other questions, and he quickly shakes his head, which is probably contradicting to the nod.

He hopes Sensei understands either way.

“I’m...” he’s what? Okay? Not okay? Lost? Confused? Thinking about a ghost he knows *nothing* about? “...fine.”

“Fine?” his teacher repeats with a raised eyebrow. Present Mic’s face softens slightly and his head quirks a bit to the side, “y’know, Listener, I’ve been a teacher for a long time now, and I gotta tell ya, when a student says they’re fine they’re not usually fine.”

There’s a pause, where Izuku shrugs, gaze dropping to his shoes.

“You were having a lot of trouble staying focused, and from what I could tell, you were dissociating pretty bad, Kiddo,” Mic’s voice is soft again. Maybe even the softest he’s ever heard from his eccentric, loud spoken teacher, “do you need to see HoundDog? I can walk ya down before the next class starts? I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

“No,” he shakes his head promptly. This wasn’t a probably he could talk to the counsellor about. It wasn’t a problem he could talk to *anyone* about. “I’m sorry, I... I’m just having friend troubles, I think? Really, I’m... I don’t need to see HoundDog. I really am okay, just...

Sorry about spacing out during class."

"It's alright," Mic-Sensei assures with a gentle smile, "sometimes you just can't help it. Just one of those days, huh?"

Izuku gives a light nod, fiddling with his assignment paper.

"Tell ya what, Listener," Mic-Sensei's voice is almost back to the usual chipper tone he teaches with. It's still softer like before, but it's a nice middle between the softspoken and his bright teaching tones, "why don't you stop by at the start of lunch and we'll make sure you've got all the notes, okay? And if you need a bit more time with that assignment, you can pass it in at the end of the day, or even before class on Monday, sound good?"

"Yes, Sensei," Izuku lets out a breath of relief, crinkling the paper as he tightens his grip. He really had stayed behind expecting to get lectured—to be in trouble for not paying attention. And honestly, he does feel bad about not paying attention—he shouldn't have let himself get so wrapped up in Oboro. "I really am sorry, I'll try not to let it happen again."

"Don't worry your little head, Listener," his teacher chirps back, and he's suddenly back to his usual self. The softness almost completely wiped from his tone. But it's almost comforting that Present Mic is letting this go so easily. "It's nothing we can't fix with a little extra work, ya'dig?"

Izuku lets a small smile curl onto his own lips.

He liked Present Mic.

He'd always seemed super nice on the radio, and it's nice to know he's actually like that in real life. Some people just put on an act when they're in the spotlight—a persona that'll be well received by the public.

Izuku's not sure that's the case for the eccentric radio host and Pro Hero. It's nice.

"Oh, hey, before you head out," Mic-Sensei interrupts Izuku's thoughts. He hadn't been spacing out, just thinking, "was there anything I could help you with? Y'know, with your friend problem that's troubling you? Or if not, that's fine too!"

Izuku opens his mouth to promise he's okay before he shuts it with a

click of his teeth.

Wait a second...

Maybe he *could* help...

“When did you start teaching here, Sensei?”

The question catches his teacher off guard. He can tell. Mic-Sensei's eyebrows furrow in surprise and his mouth forms an ‘o’ shape before his expression relaxes out and he lets out a laugh, “ah, I’ve been here about... six years?”

“What about Aizawa-Sensei?”

The surprise doesn’t show on Present Mic’s face a second time, but he does cock his head in confusion. The man blinks slowly before replying uncertainly, like Izuku has some kind of ulterior motive behind the question, “Aizawa started a semester after I did.”

Izuku nods his head. Six years. Good, he’s got a time frame now.

“Thank you, Mic-Sensei."

“No problem,” the man mutters without a second thought. He sobers a bit, a light frown of suspicion tugging at his lips, “is there a... reason you’re asking about us, or are ya asking all your teachers when they started?”

“No, no reason,” Izuku rubs the back of his neck, teeth digging into his lip a way he hopes doesn’t look suspicious. It probably does, but what can he do? “I was just curious, I guess. You’re just... a great teacher, Sensei, and uhm, so is Aizawa-Sensei in like... his own kinda way...?”

“Thanks, Listener,” Present Mic nods slowly, eyeing the teen over before he lets out a sigh, “now, you’d better get to your next class. The bell’ll be ringing soon. If you are late, tell Ectoplasm to shoot me a message and I’ll excuse ya, yo. I did ask you to stick around for a sec.”

“Thank you!” Izuku bows quickly before standing up again, “I’ll see you at the start of lunch, Sensei!”

Izuku sprints out the door before his Sensei can get another word in.

It’s hours later that Izuku finds himself alone in the library.

He's not sure where Oboro had gone, he hadn't seen him since English when he'd sent him away with nothing more than a glance. He hadn't been waiting outside of Midnight-Sensei's Modern Hero Art History class at the start of lunch. That's usually where Oboro found him if he wanted to spend lunch with him, and if not, Izuku would just step into the flood of students heading to the cafeteria.

It's lunch break now, or, twenty minutes into it at least.

He'd made a beeline for English when the bell had rung, stopping in with Mic-Sensei for that promised extra help.

He felt loads more confident about finishing the worksheet now that his notes were in order and he had everything he'd need. It really had helped, and thankfully, Mic-Sensei had brushed off how odd Izuku had been that morning.

Truthfully, his teacher just looked glad to see him chipper again, and not as dissociative as he'd been during class. It was still lingering; he'd had to drag himself forcefully from his thoughts on multiple occasions, but nothing had gotten as out of hand as it had in English.

He'd managed to pull himself together for the most part and keep his thoughts off his ghost friend during the rest of his classes. He thinks maybe it's because Oboro never joined him in any of those classes. Just English, homeroom and any training that Aizawa-Sensei is a part of. Anywhere his two Senseis would be, basically.

His lunch time study session had also been the perfect excuse to dodge his classmates when they asked him to join them for lunch. He felt bad doing it, but he was on a mission, and technically, he had spent lunch with Mic-Sensei, just... just not the whole lunch hour. He hadn't lied.

So, here Izuku sat at a table towards the back of the library, hidden away behind rows of books. The library was usually pretty empty unless students were cramming for tests or exams, but for the most part, the student body tended to hang out in the cafeteria, or the school yard during breaks.

There were the stragglers, of course, like him right now, tucked away and hidden.

But still, the library was silent—only disturbed by the occasional turning of a page, scratching of a pencil or a soft whisper that he could barely pick up.

Izuku looks down in front of him where six books are stacked up. Six yearbooks. All dating back the past six years. Those past six years when Present Mic-Sensei, and then shortly after, Aizawa-Sensei had been teaching at Yuuei.

The teen bites his lip as he pulls the first one off the stack, flipping through the pages in hopes of finding a familiar face and tufts of cloudy blue hair hidden in the pages.

He wants to find Oboro in one of these books. Oboro's bound to be here somewhere—he's wearing the school uniform after all. He was a student here. He knows the courses, and the teachers. He hangs around Aizawa-Sensei and Mic-Sensei. Two teachers. Izuku's teachers, so probably his own teachers too.

How else would a student know the two? They'd taught him, right? They'd been his teachers. He can't think of any other reason—nothing else adds up like this does.

So, he flips through the pages. Scans them all. Studies each photo of each student. He slowly, one by one, makes his way through the pile. Each book gets the same treatment. Each book is studied, and memorized, and scanned for one face in particular. Searched for that wide, squinty grin and cheerful blue eyes.

But he doesn't find him.

Oboro isn't in any of these books.

There's no one who even looks faintly like Oboro in any of the six books, and Izuku is frustrated. Oboro doesn't exist. Not here in these books. Not in the past six years his Senseis have been teaching at Yuuei.

Izuku lets his head thump down against the table top, swallowing down a groan of defeated annoyance.

Nothing makes sense—and he feels more lost than he had before.

As far as Izuku was concerned, his day had gone relatively well. There were ups, and there were downs.

Training had been a big success.

In just two days, he'd already made bounds and leaps with both his

natural Quirk and his gifted Quirk.

First of all, he'd touched Oboro. They'd touched of their own will, instead of whatever forced trauma manifestation had happened at the USJ and when they'd been tucked away in Izuku's bedroom. It had almost been different, using his Quirk of his own free will—channeling it instead of being swept under the undercurrents of grief, or fear, or any other strong emotions that had forced the connection.

Still, it was amazing. How cool was that? He'd touched the ghost. Had allowed the ghost access to his Quirk—he'd accessed his Quirk.

They'd touched—a living teen and a deceased teen: *touching!* Oboro didn't even have a solid form, but he did. Only when Izuku's Quirk was active.

And then there was the fact Oboro had made a *cloud*.

A cloud in Izuku's living room.

Sure, he'd seen the clouds at the USJ, but it felt all the more real when it was in his house. He knew for a fact nothing could've done it beside Oboro. Clouds don't appear in apartments, not that they supposedly just appear in the enclosed dome of the USJ, but Izuku knows for a *fact* that clouds don't appear in apartments. There was no doubt about the fact that Oboro could harness Izuku's Quirk to use his own.

And if that weren't already progress enough, he'd also made serious progress with One for All too.

He'd only ever seen All Might rely on his fists in the heat of the battle. So Izuku had as well. It had seemed right; logical. Punching. Using fists.

It was All Might's Quirk, so he should use it like All Might, right?

Wrong.

Izuku didn't have the same bulking frame. He was small; agile in a way the Pro could never be in his Hero form. Izuku was small and could easily rely on his feet instead of his fists.

Kicks just made so much more sense. He could put so much power into whipping around to kick something, someone. He was powerful with his fists as well, but kicking just worked better for him, and his body type. He could try as hard as he wanted to build up mass, but it

was unrealistic to think he'd ever reach All Might's frame.

Besides, being small wasn't a curse—well, it had been when he was little, but now it was a blessing in disguise. He was fast. Could throw himself into a roundhouse kick without much thought. He was light on his feet, but strong. His kicks held serious power—maybe even more than his fists if he can continue strengthening his ability to direct One for All to his feet better.

Plus, if he uses his feet, he doesn't risk injuring his arms any more than he already has because frankly... the scars are starting to get worrying. And he knows that by how Aizawa-Sensei's gaze had lingered on his arm to play 'connect the scars' when he'd been checking him for major injuries after their Quirk training session that morning.

And he really didn't want to push his arms and hands past the point that he can no longer use them.

He can use his feet as his primary attack method, but he can't always rely on being able to swing into a kick. He's got to have other effect moves, like Sensei had mentioned at the USJ.

And his teacher really had had cool hidden moves that Izuku couldn't even dream of having.

Sensei was so cool.

Still, Izuku feels quite accomplished as he walks home from the train station.

He knows the day hadn't been perfect.

His dissociating episode in English class that worried his teacher to the point he'd suggested an impromptu counsellor visit, as well as slamming into a dead-end on the first lead Izuku had managed to get when it came to trying to figure out his ghost friend.

Not to mention the fact that he's sore still; bruised and with his fingers bandaged at Recovery Girl's insistence. But he's feeling good all things considered.

He's alone today; Oboro having found him while he was doing sparring with Asui towards the end of the day. Present Mic had apparently been called in specifically for a villain attack in the city, and Oboro had been bouncing on the balls of his heels as he'd raved

about tagging along.

Izuku had nodded his head, frowning as Asui caught him with her tongue in his second of distracted. His brain was half a second too late to dodge around it like he had been up until that point. He shot the ghost a glare as he struggled halfheartedly against the restraint of Asui's tongue before turning his attention back to his frog friend who was blinking in surprise.

"Pay attention, Midoriya." Sensei had scowled from across the room, shaking his head. Izuku wasn't sure how the man always saw them whenever they weren't at their best—it was a scary talent. "You're a sitting target when you're distracted."

The ghost had shot him a sheepish grin before disappearing from sight, no doubt to join Present Mic like he'd been talking about. The teen blew out a breath, dragging his gaze away from where it had shot to his Sensei's stern tone and back onto Tsuyu as his friend let him loose. "Again?"

Asui nodded, settling into an attack stance.

The day had finished off as it usually did. After his distraction of a friend was gone, he'd managed to push himself to the limits. He'd performed to his full potential, and gave it his all. Sensei didn't have to remind him to focus again.

Izuku didn't mind leaving by himself, though it was weird to not have Oboro by his side. He'd grown used to walking home with the ghost in the two and a half weeks they'd been doing it.

And to be fair, he hadn't even really walked alone.

He walked to the station with Iida and Ochako, who always invite him to walk with them, but he usually excuses himself and left a bit later so he could walk home with the ghost. It was nice walking with people he could talk too without having to pretend to be on a call, or risk looking like a crazy person.

They'd really just talked about lessons, the homework they'd been given for their core classes, and about how harsh Aizawa-Sensei could be at times. They only talked about him because he'd lectured Uraraka about pushing herself too hard instead of taking small steps in an attempt to build up her endurance when she'd made herself sick towards the end of class after overusing her Quirk.

It was a fair lecture, as Sensei's intense talks usually were, but no one liked being on the receiving end of them. Even if they were incredibly useful.

He'd waved to them as he stepped onto his own train. Ochako's went in the other direction, and Iida's was about ten minutes after theirs.

The rest of his walk home was quiet.

He'd settled down at the kitchen table to work on his homework when he'd arrived. First on the English assignment, and then on his math homework.

He was halfway through his math equations when there was a steady knock on the door.

Izuku cocked his head in the direction of the door, frowning as he pushed himself up and padded through the apartment to open it. He really doesn't know who it could be—Kacchan and his family are the only people who know where he lives, but he knows his hardheaded childhood friend definitely wouldn't stop in for a visit.

And none of his school friends know where he lives, and Oboro doesn't bother with doors—usually can't anyways.

Izuku pulled the door open, back going ramrod when he makes eye contact with their landlord standing patiently on the other side.

He probably should've checked the peephole before opening the door. Then maybe he could've come up with something more than the quiet, "H-hi." he accidentally squeaks out.

The teen winces internally at the pathetic noise he'd just made in his surprise, wanting to do nothing more than face palm. He doesn't, but he wants too.

"Hey, Kid," the man greets. He's short—just a bit taller than Izuku is but that's not really a positive comparison. Portly, but with a friendly face and kind eyes. He'd always been a kind, lenient landlord over the years. He's older, mid to late fifties—his own daughter had been Izuku's babysitter for a couple years after his dad had left. She's in university in America now. "Your mother home?"

"No," Izuku shakes his head, "not yet. Y-you know how hectic her schedule is sometimes... Was there... a message I could deliver to her?"

The man shuffles his feet, biting his lip before sighing. “It’s not something you should be worried about, Kid, you’re going to that fancy school, eh? Yuuei? That’s what you should be worried about. I’ll come back around later to talk to her.”

Izuku gives a slow nod, wondering briefly how he knows which school he goes too before remembering he’s currently in his school uniform. Then his brain catches up to the ‘I’ll come back around later’, and he knows that his landlord isn’t going to catch her—if Izuku, who lives in the same apartment can’t, the landlord probably won’t. “No, it’s okay. I… what, uhm, what do you need my mom for?”

“Well,” the man clears his throat, “just… rent was due last week and I didn’t receive anything from her.”

His mother hadn’t paid their rent? Izuku tried not to let the surprise show on his face, “ah… I’m sorry. She must’ve forgotten. I’ll… I’ll let her know when I see her.”

“Thanks kid,” the man gives him a light smile, “just let her know I stopped by. Good luck with your classes, I hear they’re tough.”

“T-thank you,” Izuku forced a smile onto his own face, despite the sinking feeling in his chest. *She hadn’t paid rent.* She’d never not paid rent before… “I’ll let her know you’re looking for her when I see her. Thank you for stopping in.”

Izuku bows slightly, hoping that the action will hide his nervous eyes behind his hair when he straightens back up. The man gives him a smile, and a light wave before turning the walking away down the hall without another word. Izuku finds himself a couple seconds later stood in the exact position, leaning too heavily on the open door.

He swallows, slowly easing the door shut.

She hadn’t paid rent. She’d always paid rent. Why… why hadn’t she paid rent?

Izuku treks numbly back into the apartment, blinking owlishly at his homework spread along the table.

Now that he thinks about it… when was the last time he’d seen her? Heard from her? When… when was the last time she’d given him food money? He remembers finding more than he usually would a couple weeks ago; being surprised. It wasn’t enough for rent, but it was more than he’d ever gotten.

That was... the start of the school year. He'd just figured it was a 'Good job, Izuku, getting into Yuuei high school is no easy feat!' kinda thing. But now that he thinks about it... he hadn't really talked to her about getting into Yuuei—had simply left all the school admission forms on the table before school started one evening and they'd been signed by the next morning.

He honestly doesn't remember the last time he'd seen his mother face to face.

A rush of panic crawls up his spine as he chokes on a breath.

He hadn't had any contact with her for *weeks*—almost a full *month*. Those signatures had been the last time she'd actually been in the apartment and left him something of proof that she was coming around. That extra food money and those signed documents.

Izuku turns on his heels and walks down the hallway leading to their bedrooms.

There's a sinking feeling in his chest.

His mother's light is off, as it always is. He pauses outside her door—he'd always respected her space. Never going in. The last time he'd been in her room had been when he was little, after a nightmare. He's wandered in, dragging his fist across his eyes to wipe away his tears and begged to sleep with her.

He hadn't been allowed to sleep with her. She'd sat up drowsily, casted a nervous look behind him like there was someone behind him (there wasn't), before frowning down at him and leading him back to his own room. He remembers trembling as she'd tucked him back in, scared to be alone but she'd left him anyways.

He doesn't hesitate outside the door for long, biting the inside of his cheek before pushing the door open and flicking the lights on.

And...

It's empty.

Her clothes are gone. The bed is made, and untouched. Her spare shoes are nowhere to be seen; the closet is practically bare besides old outfits she never wore anymore, things that didn't fit, or that she didn't quite like anymore. Everything in her outfit rotation was gone.

There're empty clothes hangers left strewn on the rod in her closet, and Izuku can imagine her ripping her clothes off the hangers in a hurry. He bites down so hard on his lip that he's sure he broke skin.

The more he looks, the emptier it feels; the smaller *he* feels.

There's a light layer of dust coating everything from the shelves, to the bedside tables and lamps.

Izuku forces in a breath when he realizes he hadn't been breathing. It burns his lungs, but he still takes another steadying breath because breathing is important.

She's gone.

Everything of his mother's is gone. The drawers are empty. All her little knick-knacks are gone. Her makeup isn't there, and the few photos she'd framed, over the years, hung along the walls and perched on her tables are nowhere to be seen.

She's... she's really gone.

He feels sick. He feels dizzy. He feels like the world is suddenly crumbling around him.

His mom is gone.

He steps stiffly into the room; perches on the edge of the bed as a numb feeling settles in his entire being. She'd left. She was gone... and she hadn't even... she hadn't said goodbye.

He wants to cry, but no tears surface. Maybe he's just too tired to cry. Maybe it's not even worth crying over.

A small part of him had known this was coming. A tiny, logical part of his brain knew it was only a matter of time. She'd been pulling away from him like his father had. She'd spent more time at work. Sent fewer text messages. Her calls to him when she was at work slowed before they'd stopped entirely. She stopped coming home when he was home, and avidly avoided him.

It was all there—he'd seen this coming, so why did it *hurt so bad*?

He drags his palms down his eyes and then his cheeks, exhaustion hitting him like a truck. He hunches forward to drop his head between his knees in an attempt to calm his churning stomach, freezing when

his eyes catch a piece of paper on his mother's bedside table.

It's folded, tucked halfway under the lamp, but he can see his own name written out in his mother's perfect scrawl. He sucks in a breath as his fingers settle over the penmanship before he carefully pulls it out.

He stares at his name. He doesn't know how long he does. It's like he can't force his attention away—like if he looks away, or pays it any mind at all it'll disappear from his fingers. He thumbs over the lettering of his name before finally finding the courage to unfold it.

And he wishes he hadn't.

I'm sorry.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku is questioning everything, and oops to me turning his world upsidedown. Sorry bb Izu, things gotta get worse before they get better! The next few chapters won't be related to canon in the anime at all, but it'll get back onto track soon, I promise! Also I love Present Mic being best teacher! I wish I had a teacher like him in school :(

Now, I have a request for you guys if you wanna participate (and don't feel like you have too!) I'll be adding some cats to the fic soon because, y'know, Aizawa and kitties? Yeah. I'll be writing my own cat in since he's a spitfire with the nickname 'Satan', but I'm also looking for another cat or two (Aizawa totally hoards cats, can't change my mind). So, if you'd like, drop your cats down in the comments, I'd appreciate it! Be as descriptive as you want, add their personality, and nicknames that they've been given! Maybe some insider knowledge or stories about your cat being adorable or hellspawn. Rant about your cats, I'd love to read it! Again, don't feel like you have too! I can just base cats off cats I know IRL, but I thought this would be fun :D

You can make up a cat if you'd like, or don't have one, but please no cats from other fanfics, unless the cat is yours! I don't wanna accidentally copy someone's idea!

The next update is already being written, but as always, comments are greatly appreciated! I love seeing what you guys are thinking! And thanks again for all the activity this fic has been getting!

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> Welcome back!
>
> Firstly, I'd like to thank everyon who commented a cat on the last chapter! I was honestly floored at the responses-- that was a lot of cats! I greatly enjoyed reading all about your guy's kitties, or kitties you guys know irl. There're so many responses, I feel bad picking just two! It was definitely a lot of fun reading the comments though, everyone's cats sound so adorable (and mischievous)! Thanks to those who participated, and those who just left kind comments :D
>
> Now, this chapter is also a bit angsty, but there are no new additional tags, so, without further ado, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku doesn't remember falling asleep in his mother's room. He doesn't remember sinking to the floor with his back against the bed, face tucked into his knees, and arms clutching around his knees like a lifeline, but that's how he'd woken up. Sore and stiff, eyes dry and irritated.

The paper, his mother's note, had been refolded and grasped in his hand the whole night.

It's a little wrinkled now, new folds in the paper from where he'd held too tight in his sleep. The note brings back the numbness from the night before, but he's kinda glad he's numb. He'd rather numbness than heartbreak. It's the better option.

He sits on the floor for a while before managing to pull himself up. His body moves on autopilot as he treks through the apartment. Feet dragging more than stepping. It feels colder now. Bigger than what he's used too. He feels small.

It doesn't feel real, but the note in his hand is very much so.

A tiny part expects him to find his mother in the kitchen, or sitting in the living room.

It's dumb.

I'm sorry.

She's not of course. He's alone.

The apartment remains the same it had been when he'd made his way to her room. His books and papers are all scattered on the table, half completed. He drops heavily into his chair from the night before, feeling more exhausted than he had when he'd fallen asleep.

The note sits before him, turn upside down on top of his math assignment so he can't see his name. Looking at it hurts his heart, but seeing his name in her scrawl shatters it completely.

He doesn't have enough money for rent—he barely has enough money to buy himself school lunches and instant ramen to tide him over until the next lunch. He'd spread that allowance he'd been given as thinly as he could, but it still wasn't enough. Soon he'd have none left, which meant he'd have no food.

Izuku lets his head fall down onto the table, straying his fingers away from the note as if it had burnt him.

Now isn't the time to give up.

He can't let this hurt him. Not now.

He was a Yuuei student; a Hero Course student. He'd been living alone for a long time now but... he'd never done it *alone*. His mother had always made sure he had everything he needed, even if she wasn't really around. She fed him, and clothed him, made sure he had an education, and a roof over his head.

But he was alone now.

There was no help. She'd left. She'd left without a word, just like his father. She'd packed up, and moved her belongings out. Left when he was gone, or in the middle of the night—he's not sure. No one was going to help him. No one knew, and frankly, he's not sure anyone would even want to help him.

He didn't have his mom, or his dad. Not anymore.

No family.

He really was alone.

But could he do it alone...?

He'd have to try.

He wasn't going to give up.

How could he be a Hero if he gave up when things got tough? This was... it was a learning curve. This would make him stronger. He'd learn from this.

Izuku pulled in a ragged breath, glancing down at his homework before pushing himself up from his chair.

He wasn't going to sit around while everything he'd worked so hard for crumbled.

The cool morning breeze assaulted his face when he stepped out of the apartment building doors.

He hadn't bothered pulling on a sweater, or a jacket—in fact, the chill washed over the numb feeling that had settled in his bones and made him *feel*. He shivered lightly as he stepped away from the doors, happy to that he wasn't really as numb as he felt.

He'd spent a great deal of time thinking. Worrying.

He was alone now.

His mother had left just as his father had, and it's not like they have any close family friends he could turn too. Kacchan wouldn't care, and he didn't know where he stood with Auntie. When his friendship with Kacchan crumbled away, he'd slowly stopped seeing the woman as well, even though their parents had been close friends.

He thinks briefly of telling his Sensei what had happened, or even mentioning it to HoundDog or Present Mic, but he thinks better of it. They don't need to worry about him outside of school—he already causes enough problems in school. And what if they didn't care? What would he do then? He's not sure he could pick himself back up *again* if it was proven he really was alone in this. He was slowly starting to trust his teachers—what if he was *wrong*?

Izuku shoves his frozen fingers into the pockets of his jeans. He's glad he had half a mind to change out of his school uniform, even if the blazer jacket would've added some additional warmth. The thin shirt does little to protect him from the morning chill, but at least he'd opted for a long sleeve shirt instead of a tee shirt.

He knows he can't do nothing. He can't survive if he does nothing.

He needed a means to feed himself. He had pocket change—the remainder of what he'd been given at the start of the school year, but that's almost gone. His money had dwindled down with each passing meal, and soon he'd have none left.

At this point, he could barely afford his next school lunch.

He knew he wasn't going to steal anything. Not money, or food; he was training to be a Hero, and that was against his morals. But he knew he needed to feed himself. He couldn't just stop eating—especially with One for All in him.

So, the first thing he'd done that Saturday morning was make his rounds to all the shops in the neighborhood. He offered his services. Cleaning windows, mopping floors. Stocking convenience and grocery store shelves, bagging purchases. He offered to make deliveries for restaurants in the area, to clean and wait on tables. He offered to wash dishes, or clean bathrooms, or do any other annoying jobs that everyone always hated doing.

He went into each store with a wide smile and offered to do whatever they needed done—be it manual labor or just a helping hand.

But no one took him up on it.

And he'd known it was a possibility. He was fifteen—he hadn't prepared a resume in his desperation, and he probably didn't look presentable. He hadn't really thought this through, just knew he needed money, and the only way to get money was to work for it.

One by one the shops and small businesses shot him down. Apologetic smiles, pitying shakes of people's heads. Soft declines. No one wanted to hire a teenager. They looked at him and saw a kid. No one trusts a kid without a resume; a kid with no past work experience. No one was willing to give him a chance.

Izuku was feeling down as early evening approached. He'd been asking around all morning and afternoon, feet carrying him along the streets and in and out of any shop open. He didn't plead, or beg—that wouldn't help his case, but he asked kindly, making sure to smile.

The rejection was starting to weigh in on him. He'd tried to come off as friendly, and reliable—responsible—but no one was willing to take the risk.

He was on his way back to the apartment when he noticed a sign perched on the sidewalk. It was black, and written on it in curly, formal chalk lettering was ‘Come in, we’re open!’, along with the business’s name stamped on the center top of the board and a blocky arrow that pointed towards a door Izuku gad never noticed before.

He’d never noticed the sign before, nor the door tucked away on the side of one of the buildings. He’d walked this path before—with his mother when he was little, and he’d passed by every day when walking to his junior high, so he’s surprised he’d never noticed it.

He does as the sign suggests and walks into the little business. A bell above the door chimes his arrival and friendly faces greet him from behind the counter.

It was a small little coffee shop.

There were maybe six small two-seat tables spread along, as well as a coffee counter and a display case of fresh baked goods. It didn’t look like much from the outside, but the inside was bustling with activity—a hidden gem in the streets of his neighborhood.

Izuku stepped into the small, three-person long line, his thoughts on a warm drink to ease the ache and chill in his fingers. He’s not sure if the cold stirred up the ache from his still healing fingers, or if they just genuinely hurt, but he hopes a warm drink will help.

When it’s finally his turn, he orders a hot chocolate, hand digging into his pocket to pull out the change, just praying he has enough to cover it. He does, thankfully. He feels bad passing over a handful of loose coins, but the woman takes it with a friendly smile.

Its family owned, as a lot of the businesses in his neighborhood are, and it appeared the whole staff was related. Parents, their children and maybe even a grandchild or two working the different jobs of running a small little café. They work fluidly, stepping around each other with ease to keep the line moving and hot drinks and baked goods coming out.

His hopes of being able to feed himself had slowly flickered away as he’d noticed it, watching as they worked. He stands with his hands jammed in his pockets waiting for his drink. He debates asking the question, already wallowing in the rejection that hasn’t come yet.

He still finds himself asking—desperation winning over.

The woman making the drinks hands him his hot chocolate. She's older, one of the owners he'd guess by how he'd watched her order the others around firmly but kindly. He grabs the to-go cup with his bandaged hand, and her eyes linger on the bandages.

He hesitates for a second, just a moment before speaking, "I, uhm, I was just wondering if... if you were looking to hire anyone? I'm in need of an afterschool job, and I promise I'll be a good worker—I... I can do anything you need! I," he swallows roughly, wincing, "I don't have a resume, or... or any work experience but I'm a fast learner!"

He's ready to accept defeat as she pauses. The woman who'd taken his order, this woman's daughter perhaps, glances over before returning her gaze to the customer before her.

The older woman eyes him, looks him up and down like she's gaging his worth. He knows she'd noticed the handful of change he'd used to buy his drink, and she'd seen his fingers and hands too. The wounds still healing. He hopes she doesn't peg him a delinquent roughed up from fighting.

He knows he doesn't look very good after a full day in the chilly air and constant rejection—from other businesses as well as his mother.

Maybe she can read it all on his face, in his eyes, just how desperate he is. The woman lets out a drawn-out sigh, turning to the espresso machine behind her to prepare the next order, and he just knows his face crumples in defeat.

"Okay," she sighs out, handing the espresso the waiting man on Izuku's left before scanning him again as she leans against the counter, "I'm sure we can find something for you to do."

It was an under-the-table job.

Waiting on tables, cleaning and taking out the trash. Making drinks, and helping out in the kitchen to prepare for the next morning's baking. He wouldn't get close to minimum wage, but he would be paid out of pocket at the end of each shift. It wasn't actual employment, and he knew it wasn't permanent. There wasn't really anything official about it.

But it was something, and he'd have money again.

She'd offered him three hours a day, every day starting just after school finished.

He'd jumped at the offer—how could he not? It was overly generous, and he was in desperate need. He knew it was a pity job, but it's not like he really had any other choice. He needed to eat, and it's not like he could start stealing—that was against everything he stood for.

So, he'd started working. He earned his pay, and did it with a smile on his face.

"So..." Oboro drawls when Izuku sits himself down at his desk in English, "where've you been? I dropped by your apartment like four times this weekend, and the only time you were there, you were passed out on your homework, which is bad for the back, lemme tell ya. And where'd you run off to so fast after Quirk training with Sho? You were like a ghost, and that's coming from a ghost."

He'd seen Oboro at his weekend training session with Sensei, but he hadn't gotten the chance to speak with him. He'd left, had needed to leave fast after he finished in order to make it to the coffee shop in time—the last thing he needed was to be tardy arriving at the only job who'd even considered him.

He'd also tried to leave without being noticed so he wouldn't have to shoo Oboro away. It was easier to just leave without him because the ghost couldn't follow him then, and he's like 95% sure the ghost can't just locate him with magic locating powers. He needs to actually see where you're going before he can find you there.

But besides that, he hadn't seen Oboro at that morning's Quirk training. Izuku assumes the ghost was with Present Mic instead, but he literally could've been anywhere. He's a ghost, a secretive ghost.

"I've been busy," Izuku replied as he organized his belongings on the desk. He pushed the finished assignment from the last class up to the corner of his desk to hand in when Present Mic showed up. "I've been doing some work for a bit of extra money."

"Oh?" Oboro cocks his head in interest. "Saving up to buy something?"

Izuku rubs at the back of his neck, giving a hum of acknowledgement. He's not, unless keeping himself fed counts, but he's not going to tell the ghost. The last time Oboro had gotten into his business he'd found himself telling Aizawa-Sensei far more than he wanted too in that conference room. And, sure, maybe it had worked out in the end, but he still wasn't gonna do it.

“So, ya gonna tell me where you’re working?”

“No,” Izuku huffs a laugh, shaking his head, “and you’re not allowed to follow me either. I need to focus when I’m there, and that’s hard when you’re around.”

“It’s my sparkling personality, isn’t it?” Oboro gives a dramatic sigh, though his lip curled with disappointment. “Or it’s my boyish good looks, right?”

“Sure,” Izuku teases with a shrug. “Whatever you say.”

Oboro scoffs in offense, but it doesn’t stay long. “Hey, listen, sorry about Friday by the way—I know we didn’t really see much of each other, and you were kinda… *spacey* in English, didn’t wanna push my luck, y’know? Sometimes I gotta decide whether being there is helping or doing the opposite.”

Izuku gives a light nod, raising a hand to wave at one of his peers, Jirou, who walks in, returns the wave before plopping down at her own desk to listen to her music. “It’s okay. I was just thinking, and I guess I got carried away. Mic-Sensei checked in with me.”

“Good,” Oboro’s smile is light, “so you’re feeling better then?”

Izuku lets a tiny smile lift onto his lips, “yeah, I am.”

He’s not, but he’s not going to say that.

He’s still feeling numb, like he’ll walk home one of these days to see his mother—but she’s not going to be there. Logically he knows she’s gone. He hasn’t the faintest idea where she is, but when he’d called her workplace from a payphone outside the café asking about her without making himself known, they’d said she quit weeks prior.

She could be anywhere now.

“I’m glad,” his ghost friend smiles, unaware of Izuku’s internal struggles. “So, did you want to work on your Quirk after school today? I think you’re right that the more we do it, the easier it’ll be, right?”

“Can’t,” Izuku lifted a shoulder in a shrug, “I work after school.”

Oboro’s bottom lip jutted out in a pout, “well… when’s your next break? What days are you off then? We’ll work on it then.”

Izuku shakes his head, “I work every day after school. And most of the weekend too.”

“You... every day?” the playfulness is gone from the ghost’s expression, replaced with a sour looking expression, “...really? When do you, like, get a break then?”

Izuku shrugged, hunching forwards. He didn’t have time for breaks. He needed to make money. He needed to attend his classes. He needed to attend his Quirk training and counselling. He had to keep working because if he doesn’t, he’ll lose it all. And he *can’t* do that.

“I’m fine,” Izuku waves a hand, trying to ignore the calculating look in Oboro’s gaze.

Oboro opens his mouth to respond, to dispute that, but before he can manage, Present Mic walks into the room grinning as he gives a loud greeting. Izuku shoots up, grabbing the paper from the edge of his desk to pass in before moving to greet the teacher, leaving the ghost to huff, already knowing their conversation is over for now.

There’s something about this that makes him feel... bad. But he can’t put his finger on it.

The days carry on.

Each day Izuku wakes up early, and catches the train to school. He does Quirk training, or counselling, respectively, before starting his classes like usual.

He tries to keep up appearances, smiling at his peers and quelling any worry from his ghost friend, living friends and his teachers to the best of his abilities. After school is finished, he hops back onto the train, and tries to do his homework on the trip home, but it makes him motion sick most of the time.

He knows he doesn’t have time to do it later between his hours at the café, and how exhausted he is when he gets home. So, he forces down the sick feeling and tries his hardest to answer the questions. Maybe he’ll have to start doing his homework at lunch?

Wednesday had been the worst day of his week.

He’d apologetically informed the woman who’d hired him that he’d be late on Wednesday due to the fact that it was the one day a week he

stayed after school with his Sensei—and she'd offered him the day off. But he couldn't do that, because he needed the money, so instead, he did his training and then arrived in to help close up the coffee shop.

By the time he got home on he was dead on his feet, and he's sure he wasn't much better the following day at school.

He tried not to give his peers anything to be worried about, but he knew they still were.

Just like his teachers, except now, instead of Aizawa-Sensei and Mic-Sensei studying him, all of his teachers were. It wasn't obvious—but he could see them looking away whenever he looked at them. He could see the confusion clouding their eyes when he'd yawn for the third time, or catch his eyes slipping closed accidentally.

All Might had even tried to check in on him, leading him into one of those conference rooms that Aizawa-Sensei had shown him and awkwardly asking if he was alright.

He'd promised he was perfectly fine before launching into the progress with OfA he'd made with Sensei, and that seemed to distract the Number One Hero well enough.

It wasn't just All Might either, he could see the worry on both his Sensei's faces as well, but they weren't as awkwardly upfront about it. Well, Present Mic had reminded him that he was always there if he needed to talk, while Sensei hadn't really said anything, but he also hadn't pushed him quite as hard.

None of that even came close to the worry from Oboro though.

It was getting harder to keep the ghost out of his business. Oboro was persistent. Following him around and worrying vocally. Where everyone else watched from afar, questioning him in round-about ways, Oboro certainly didn't. Izuku's not sure he'd ever met anyone as confident and persistently caring in his life.

Maybe it was his lack of sleep making him more irritable than usual, but the ghost was starting to get on his nerves.

By the time Friday rolls around again, Izuku's exhausted. He'd barely had the time to sleep—had actually fallen asleep on the train with his homework in his lap. He'd lost his pencil somewhere, and hadn't had the energy to try and find it.

His shift at the café is long. Not in real time—he's not there for more than three hours like usual, but it feels longer. It feels like he wipes the tables for hours, and he knows he accidentally mixed up a few orders too. Thankfully, people just laughed when he did instead of getting offended.

He was sure if someone had've yelled at him, he'd have started crying.

He pretends he doesn't see the pitying looks the owners and staff send him as he stumbles over a tired and anxious apology. They let him leave twenty minutes early, sending him off with his pay for a full three hours, and a paper bag of baked goods that the baker, the owner's husband, had promised were going to be thrown out, despite the fact Izuku knew they'd just come out of the oven an hour or so earlier.

He walks home on numb legs, barely managing to carry himself up to the apartment. And when he gets there, it feels like a tsunami washes over him as his gaze settles on the door. He wants to cry.

With shaking fingers, he pulls the *eviction notice* off the door just enough to be able to read it without ripping it off. He scans over it as a deep, heavy sigh rattles out of his lungs.

Izuku lets his head thump against the door as his shoulders sag. He unlocks the door, unsurprised to find his key still works. Their landlord is far too kind. At this point they're two weeks late for the rent, so he could've changed the locks, but he hadn't. Not yet.

Izuku knows he couldn't have gotten rent together even if he'd tried. He simply couldn't work enough while also putting as much effort into his hero classes, training, and school work.

He pushes the door open, and despite the pull to collapse in his bed, or on the couch, he sets to work.

He'd slowly been packing in preparation for this. He'd known this was coming from the moment the landlord had knocked on the door to inquire about their rent. It's not like his landlord will just look the other way if he stopped paying rent. He was a nice man, but he wasn't that nice. Nor stupid.

Izuku had just been riding it out for as long as he could. Clearly his luck's run out now.

He had a duffle bag settled on his desk, filled so far with his Hero

Analysis notebooks, some of his favorite All Might merch, an old photo album he was surprised, yet entirely not at the same time, to find still tucked away. He'd grabbed some of the few photos off the walls too—the ones from simpler times. When his mother... when she liked him.

The rest of the bag he'd filled with knick-knacks and clothes. Whatever he could shove in. Things he couldn't bear to part with. It was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do—select what was important enough to jam into the single duffle bag he was taking. He's sure he's wiping sad and exhausted tears off his cheeks as he zips it up.

His backpack gets the same treatment—though it's mostly clothes. He jams his school uniforms, some of his favorite sweaters and a couple changes of clothes in beside his school supplies. He manages to fit his laptop, phone and all the corresponding chargers in as well. He'd need those for school.

Lastly, he slips on another sweater, an All Might one, a favorite of his, and then pockets the small stockpile of money he'd managed to save between his school meals and travel expenses.

He leaves a note of apology for the landlord on the table, silently feeling awful that he was leaving so much behind—but he really couldn't take a couch, or the oven with him. He knows his landlord will have no ill intent about it, but it is a bunch of extra work on his plate. He really does feel bad.

Along with the note, Izuku leaves his own house key. He has no idea where his mother's is, but he leaves his just as proof he's gone. The locks'll probably be changed since both keys aren't present and the landlord can't be sure they didn't make any copies, but he still feels better leaving it. He doesn't even want it anymore anyways.

The teen gives the apartment, his home for his whole life, one last glance before grabbing his duffle bag and easing the door shut behind him with a soft click. It's late enough that he knows he won't run into his landlord, but he still sneaks out.

He's too afraid to sleep on the streets, so instead he heads to the twenty-four-hour laundromat two blocks over and does a load of a single shirt and a pair of socks. It's a waste of money, but the 'No loitering.' signs spooks him.

He wouldn't mind too much if they were stolen while he sleeps, but he curls tightly around his duffle and backpack protectively.

With any luck the nice family he works for will let him stash his duffle bag in their tiny office until he can hide it away in his locker at Yuuei for safe keeping until he figures out what they hell he's going to do.

They do, and they thankfully don't ask any questions. He knows they want too; he can practically see the worried inquiries on the tips of their tongues, but they don't speak them. And he's not sure if he's glad they don't, or upset about it.

Oboro knows there's something up. He's sure everyone knows there's something up with Izuku. He can see it in the way his classmates peer silently at him, in the way the teachers watch him when he's not looking. He knows Hizashi and Shota are oh-so close to figuring things out—they talk, he sees the gears in their heads turning, but they're still so far away from taking the plunge into helping Izuku.

Even All Might seems to be catching on to the fact that Izuku isn't right.

But still, no one says anything. The teachers turn a blind eye, waiting for him to go to them, which is so stupid. The students watch from afar, but never try to help—he's honestly not sure how well these kids will do in the Hero Course program if they can't look at their peer, their *friend*, and see him struggling.

He wishes he could do more.

He'd been trying.

He's been trying his hardest to get Hizashi and Shota thinking about Izuku any opportunity he got. He'd rearrange their marking so Izuku's name and papers were always on top. He did it to both of them—every time he could. There wasn't a whole lot he could do—especially without Izuku by his side, but he was trying so damn hard.

The looks on their faces every time they settle down to do their marking and Izuku's paper is always on the top of the pile, and he's made sure it really is *every time*, would've been funny if it weren't for the fact no one was getting his messages. No one was helping. No one was looking into the green-haired teen.

Surely everyone was seeing what he was seeing, right? How the teen was running himself into the ground. How his focus was wavering in classes, and practice, and just in general conversation; how he was wavering. How his training was getting sloppy. How he was messing

up more these past weeks than he had been since the start of the year.

Was no one seeing it?

It had been a full week of Izuku steadily declining. He wasn't okay. He was far from it, but every time Oboro brought it up, the teen would snap at him. Avoid the instigation, and direct the conversation somewhere else. And there wasn't a lot he could do to counter it—he was a *ghost*!

It's not like he could grab ahold of the teen and shake him out of the 'I need to deal with this solely on my own' mindset—especially when Izuku was... was he blocking the connection between them? Subconsciously capping it off again like he'd been doing since he was a tyke? All Oboro knew was that he wasn't feeling the same around his green-haired friend recently as he'd been before.

What was he supposed to *do*?

Izuku had been weird for a full week now.

That Sunday, when Izuku shows up to Quirk training, Oboro can only watch from afar as his heart shatters. The teen had been... almost pulling away from him as the days carried on. He wouldn't... he wasn't ignoring him, but he wasn't acknowledging him either. There was hardly a moment to talk—Izuku was busy, and Oboro knew he couldn't overstep. Not with his friend already on edge.

The kid looks awful. He's got bags under his eyes, dark enough that they rival Shota's. He's slow, and tired. Lethargic. Shota's well enough now, most of his bandages having come off, that they're sparring, working on some hand-to-hand combat.

Oboro can see Shota holding back his attacks, blank face so close to breaking in concern. He can see the twitch of his school friend's eyebrow, how his lip quirks downward each time he sends Izuku sprawled onto the mats with what should've been easily avoidable attacks.

Each time the teenager hits the mat, it takes him a few more seconds to pull himself up. Oboro's counting them each time—first it had been five seconds, then thirteen, twenty, thirty-two, and then a full minute before he ever forces his eyes open.

The kid is so tired, like he hasn't been sleeping—and maybe he hasn't. Oboro doesn't know. He'd been kept at arm's length, and it's not like

they'd been following their routine with Izuku's new job stealing his attention after school.

"We're done, Kid," Shota's voice had softened, but it's only heard to a trained ear. It's that softness that he'd use on Hizashi when he got worked up, or his Quirk slipped accidentally and he felt bad. It probably sounds no different to the green-haired kid. "You're not up to it today."

"I am," Izuku wheezes, and that alone, and also in addition to the fact he's still sprawled on his back trying to catch his breath, really contradicts the words. "I— I'm okay, Sensei, I'm just... I'm fine. Let's keep goin—"

"No," Shota cuts the kid off with a shake of his head, arms crossing over his chest, "when we decided on these additional training sessions, I told you I'd veto them if I thought you were injured, or a danger to yourself, and guess what, Midoriya? You're a danger to yourself. Clearly these weekend training sessions are too much."

"They're not," the teen whines tiredly, "I'm fine."

"No, you're not." Shota sighs. "I'm not sure what's going on with you, Kid, but something's not right. Was there anything you wanted to talk about? Anything I should know?"

"I'm fine, I... I'm *fine*, Sensei. I promise." Izuku bows his head, "n-nothing you should know. I'm okay."

"Midoriya..." there's a hint of warning in his tone, "you're obviously not. You've been down for two minutes now. These are easily avoidable attacks—we're warming up. I've seen you dodge swifter and wilier attacks without a thought. You're *not* okay."

"You're..." the teen swallows, finally pushing himself up so he's sitting on the mat instead of laying on it. His eyes are dull, and Oboro's not even sure with what. "You're just hard to predict, Sensei. That's all."

Shota's quiet for a second before he sighs. He scratches idly at his scalp, taking care not to mess up the bun he'd put his hair up in to keep it out of his face while they sparred, "that may be so, but you're also out of it. You're a liability like this, Problem Child. I can't in good conscious let you keep going. If you can't keep up with the warm ups, I can't, *won't*, keep pushing you and expecting a different result. It's counterproductive and illogical. You're tired and I, I *know* tired, Kid. You need to get some rest."

The teen just glares down at his lap, bottom lip caught between his teeth. It's not directed at anyone, and Oboro can see Shota sees that as well, because the man doesn't comment on it like he usually would.

"We're done for today, and until I see you're taking care of yourself, we won't have another training session. I'm not going to stand back and watch you run yourself into the ground. I won't teach that. You're walking a fine line, Midoriya, don't keep pushing like this, or you'll burn yourself out."

"You're cancelling tomorrow's Quirk training?" there's a desperation in the teen's voice, a waver. Shota definitely hears it, but doesn't comment on it. Oboro bites his lip to keep himself quiet. He thinks Izuku's forgotten he's even there. "W-what about Wednesday?"

"We'll see," Shota frowns, watching as the kid finally stumbles up to a wobbly standing form. "Show me you're rested and taking care of yourself. Show me you're able to keep up with me in class tomorrow, and then we'll see where we stand with Wednesday. Now go, get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow."

Izuku does leave, bowing his head with a quiet, "yes, Sensei." before disappearing into the locker room. Oboro heaves out an unsteady breath as he watches Shota. The teacher is staring at the doorway Izuku had just disappeared through. Eyes locked on it, unblinking.

The man drags his attention away, shaking his head as he leans down to stack and pick up the mats, "just what's going on with you, Problem Child?"

Oboro would very much like to know that as well.

Izuku is gone by the time Oboro makes his way into the locker room. It couldn't have been more than five minutes that he's stood stiffly by his school friend, watching the dark-haired man stew thoughtfully as he cleaned up from their training.

Oboro bites his lip, shaking his head. He knew he should've followed right behind Izuku. Now the teen could be anywhere. He almost wishes he had've gone against Izuku's will and followed him to his new job. Maybe then he'd know where he was. Maybe he'd feel a little better.

Shota had told Izuku to rest, but if Oboro knew anything about the kid, he knew that he wasn't going too. He knew he would be on his way to work now because he worked every day apparently. It was no

wonder the kid looked like death standing.

All he can do now is head to Izuku's apartment and wait for him to come home.

It had been a few days since the ghost had gone to Izuku's apartment. He wasn't the kind of guy to go where he wasn't wanted, and a small part of him knew that Izuku didn't really want him around. But he was getting concerned. He needed to corner the teen, and find out what the hell was going on.

He'd let this go too far, had watched without helping longer than he should've.

Oboro makes his way down the familiar roads, phases through his apartment building's doors before walking up the stairs to Izuku's floor. He knows he could've just appeared in Izuku's apartment, but the other teen probably isn't even there, and this at least gives him something to do.

A noise startles Oboro from his thoughts, he freezes outside Izuku's apartment door.

There's someone inside?

He leans through the door, sticking his head in, but just as he does so, the door opens, and suddenly someone's walking through him.

"Jeez!" A voice yelps, but Oboro is overcome by an uncomfortable sickness as the surprise of someone unexpectedly phasing through him surges through him, "oi, watch the cold spot, if you make me drop this couch on my feet, I'll kill you."

"I got it, I got it," another voice scoffs.

It's just then Oboro realizes he's stood in the middle of Izuku's moving couch. He just barely manages to jump out of the way as a second body comes towards him. He gapes at the men as they carry the couch out the door, and down the hallway. He'd glad no one can see him, because he'd pretty sure he looks like a fish or something, stood there like an idiot.

"W... what?" Oboro whispers to himself, finally spinning to walk into the apartment. Izuku is... moving? Why hadn't he told him?

There's not just those two people—there's a bunch. A team. There're

people boxing up Izuku's things, other's taking the photos and any décor off the walls. He cranes his neck to see two people in the kitchen, tossing things into garbage bags. They empty the cupboards, and fridge. He takes a nervous step towards Izuku's room, noting how his room is mostly untouched; some things are missing, but the majority still there.

"What about the kid's room?" A voice calls, and it's just then Oboro realizes there's someone beside him, leaning into the room. "We taking it apart too?"

Taking it apart?

"Yes, just..." a new man joins them, eyes scanning the room with an uncertain look, "pack it up, but keep everything but the furniture. He's a good kid, I'll store it for now."

He's... what?

What is going on??

Oboro stares at the man, who's obviously in charge. His voice is soft, as are his eyes as he looks around the room again as the man, and a woman now step in with boxes. Then, his gaze darts down to a paper in his hand. A paper Oboro hadn't noticed before. Maybe he'd pulled it out of his pocket.

Curiosity piqued at the sight of Izuku's formal writing, he leans over to read.

It's an *apology* letter.

It's not very descriptive, doesn't explain much. It doesn't clear any of the confusion Oboro is feeling up, but it's honest and respectful. Izuku's sorry for not managing rent, and he's sorry to be leaving everything for this man, his landlord, Oboro realizes with a start, to dispose of.

It all crashes down around him.

Izuku wasn't here. Izuku hadn't been here. These people were tearing his apartment apart, probably in preparation for a new renter coming in. Izuku didn't have an apartment anymore.

If he did, he would've brought all his stuff. He and his mother.

Izuku didn't have a *home* anymore.

Where was his mother?

How could she let this happen? How could she... what had happened?

Where the hell was Izuku?

Oboro would never admit he was a nervous mess as Monday rolled around. He'd stayed in the apartment all day watching them tear it apart. He wishes he knew where the green-haired teen was, but he doesn't. If he did know, he'd be there instead of standing around watching this unfold like an idiot.

He watched the furniture leave, and trash bags of stuff filled and walked out. Izuku and his mother's possessions being thrown into trash bags like they're nothing more than literal trash.

Oboro swears his stomach is in his throat, as he watches Izuku's apartment, his *life*, be uprooted and stolen away. Thank God he hadn't had to watch as Izuku's room and personal possessions got the same treatment. He wasn't sure he'd be able to handle that.

The moving company had taken everything to be either resold, or even thrown away, Oboro didn't know. Everything but Izuku's belongings, which he'd followed up a few flights of stairs. As the landlord had said, they'd been packed up in four neatly packed boxes and tucked away in the landlord's apartment closet for safe keeping.

Oboro watched as a cleaning company came through, washing walls, and cleaning the bathrooms when everything was gone. It wasn't dirty by any means, but he knew that things had to be incredibly clean. He remembers moving when he was little—they'd only moved once, but his mother had stressed herself out making sure everything was tidy before they left.

By the time night falls, Oboro isn't feeling much.

He hadn't been this disconnected from the living world since just after he'd died. It's a strange feeling.

He seeks out his friends.

Catches Hizashi as he arrives home from his own evening weekend patrol downtown. The blonde man collapses onto the bed, groaning

into the covers, which prompts a huff of laughter from Shota, who's in the process of zipping up his jumpsuit. Oboro almost smiles at the exchange.

Oboro watches Hizashi lay relaxed on the bed until he hears the front door open and close, which at that point, he spins around to follow Shota.

He follows behind Shota on the man's patrol a lot closer than he usually tends too. Occasionally, his dark-haired friend would shiver, but he'd just tuck his face into his capture weapon and carry on.

His patrol was slow, and there wasn't much activity.

By the time the sun was raising above them as the early hours of the morning creeped up, Oboro felt exhausted. He was more tired than he'd been after the USJ incident, and he hadn't even *done* anything. It had been years since emotional exhaustion had washed over him like this. He hadn't even felt like this after he'd *died*.

He was confused, and worried; concerned for his friend. He didn't know where Izuku was. He didn't know if he was okay. He didn't know how long this had... how long had he been dealing with this silently? Behind closed doors, refusing to let anyone in to help?

How long had he not had a home?

Oboro feels like the worst friend ever.

He'd noticed the changes, but he never would've thought it would be this bad. Izuku was homeless as far as he could see. His mother was where ever the hell she was, he'd seen how absent she was but this? This was a whole new level of absent. They'd lost their apartment. She hadn't paid rent.

Oboro's never even met the lady—but the thought of her made his stomach roll unpleasantly.

Izuku looks the worst Oboro had ever seen him when he stumbles his way into English class.

And what's worse is he ignores him.

Completely ignores him.

For a second, Oboro thinks that maybe Izuku can't hear him anymore

—can't see him, and he panics, before he sees Izuku's eyebrow twitch in annoyance.

The fact he's ignoring him stings more than it probably should. He's used to being ignored; as a ghost now, but even when he was alive. Shota put up a good fight pretending Oboro, and the majority of their friend group didn't exist at one point or another, but he'd never been ignored by Izuku.

He chalks it up to Izuku being tired. Or, he hopes it's just because he'd tired.

Still, he doesn't stop trying.

He follows the teen to every class, which he'd never done. He trails after him silently as Izuku makes his way to the cafeteria. He grabs lunch, but falls asleep at the table instead of eating it. His friends, Iida and Ochako, as well as a couple other kids he still doesn't really know, frown and whisper hushed concerns amongst them, but no matter how hard Oboro tries to get them to ask Izuku questions through nothing more than sheer mindpower, they don't.

The kid sleeps through lunch.

He startles awake by Iida's hand on his shoulder just before the bell rings, but he laughs it off tiredly. He dumps his lunch into the garbage, completely untouched, before following his friends to class with nothing more than a glance at Oboro, who'd been stood awkwardly behind him.

Oboro stood back, waited for Izuku to come to him, but he was at the end of his rope. He can't just watch anymore.

"What is going on with you?" He asks desperately as he falls into step with his friend.

Shota had just benched the teen, and the terrifying part was that Izuku had hardly put up a fight. Had stared unseeing back at the man who'd levelled him a vicious, annoyed glare at the fact that his suggestion of rest from the previous morning had been blatantly ignored.

Oboro's gonna take a guess and say Wednesday's extra training is *probably* cancelled.

It takes Izuku a second to reply, and he's not completely sure if his friend is debating ignoring him some more, of if he's just that groggy

that he doesn't automatically realize he'd been spoken too. "What?"

"What's going on with you?" the ghost repeats, trying to keep the exasperation from his voice. He wonders if he should just up and say it, ask about the fact he'd watched Izuku's landlord gut the apartment, but he thinks that might be a bit harsh, "I've barely seen you."

"I see you every day at school. And I saw you yesterday too. You're being a little dramatic. Besides you know where I've been; I've been working. Sorry I don't have as much time to spend with you, but I've got stuff to take care of."

"That didn't count as seeing you," Oboro snapped, "Sho had to send you home because you could hardly keep yourself upright. You didn't so much as look at me at all, and you've... you've been ignoring me all day—hell, all *week*. Are you mad at me or something? Did I do something?"

"No," Izuku scoffs, looking a bit surprised at the accusation. He seems to shake the surprise off with a shake of his head, continuing with a heavy, almost annoyed sigh, "I'm not ignoring you. Maybe I'm just having a bad day. Ever thought of that? Not everything has to do with you, Oboro. I have problems outside of whatever this is."

"A bad day?" Oboro narrows his eyes, "Izuku you've been acting weird for *days*."

"So?" Izuku hisses, "I've been weird a few days, who cares?"

"I care!" Oboro shouts fiercely, "I know what's happened, Izuku, I saw it. I went to your apartment yesterday. I saw those people in your apartment—I saw the note you left. Where the hell have you been?!"

"You saw it?" Izuku's tone is icy, like Oboro had struck a nerve. He doesn't know what the nerve is, but it's too late to start treading carefully in this conversation. It's hard to *unstep* on a landmine already underfoot. "Why can't you just stay out of my business? If I wanted you involved, I would've told you."

"You're homeless!" Oboro fires back, "how'm I supposed to stay out of that? Where have you been staying? Where have you been *sleeping*? I'm *worried* about you, Izuku. I can't just ignore this. I'm worried."

Izuku's nose wrinkles like he'd trying not to scowl, "what's this matter to you anyways?"

"*What's it matter to me?*" Oboro jerks back in surprise, knowing his voice raises as he forces out a reply, "we're *friends*, that's why! I care what happens to you! You're my friend! Of course, it matters to me!"

"Are we?" Izuku snaps back under his breath, "'cause it sure doesn't feel like it!"

"W-what?" Oboro takes a tiny step backwards, but it seems Izuku is fired up, glaring at him.

"You heard me," the boy barks out, eye glowing with frustration. "I don't *know* you. I know nothing about you. You're cryptic, and you don't let me in. You know everything about me. Like literally, *everything* now because you can't keep your nose outta my business; yet, the only things you tell me are things I need to know, and even then, you don't even really tell me that stuff either! That's not... it's not *fair*. That's not what friends do. So, are we really friends? Huh? Are we?"

"I—" Oboro swallows. It feels like someone just dumped a bucket of ice water over his head. Izuku had been sitting on this the whole time? He knows he doesn't share a lot about himself—but most of it isn't important. He's a ghost, he barely even exists outside Izuku's realm.

He doesn't remember ever refusing to answer a question—besides that one about his friends, Izuku's teachers, but that's not Oboro's secret to share. He doesn't even remember Izuku asking him any questions, beside that day they laid it all out on the table after the USJ. He'd answered the questions. He'd told Izuku what he knew, so where was this coming from?

"We *are* friends," Oboro manages out weakly, glancing at the other teen. "I'm just trying too—"

"Yeah, well stop," Izuku hisses, hands clenched into shaking fists at his sides. "Just... leave me alone!"

"Midoriya!" Shota's voice booms from where he was still on the floor with the students. Oboro had honestly forgotten they were all there; his friend and Izuku's classmates. And if by the way Izuku jolts upright, looking the most awake he has all week, he can assume to the same goes for the teen.

Izuku's cheeks flood red, nervous eyes casting around at all the eyes on him. His cheeks only seem to darken when he notices everyone is

looking at him, *staring*, and Oboro can only wonder how much they'd heard. His heart pounds in his chest, sharing Izuku's anxiety of it, while simultaneously breaking because he doesn't have to deal with the repercussions of this like Izuku does.

Shota looks more concerned than he does angry, Oboro can see it even from the distance. His tone had been sharp, piercing the air, but there was an undertone of cautious concern. Oboro knows Shota isn't upset, but he's sure Izuku can't see anything past the embarrassment consuming him.

The green-haired teen launches to his feet, sprinting out of the training gym without a word. His classmates call to him, some even stepping to follow, but he doesn't stop or even slowdown in the slightest. The gym doors bang shut behind him, and they ring on Oboro's ears as a heavy silence blanketed over them.

"Leave him," the teacher growls, thankfully on top of his class and already predicting their movements. He instantly gains everyone's attention, and those who'd been moving freeze abruptly.

"But Sensei—"

"Leave. Him." Shota repeats stiffly, leaving no room for any additional complaints. "Back to sparring. All of you. Let's go, before I make you run drills instead. Don't test me."

The students remain frozen for another long second before returning to their spars. No one wants to push Aizawa, and it's definitely a good call.

Oboro remains rooted where he is, stuck exactly where he'd been when he'd taken that step away from his friend. His brain is still reeling from it all as he tries to figure out how he'd fucked this up so extraordinarily bad. He can't force himself to move.

"I hope Midoribro is okay..." Oboro hears distantly, and he thinks it's the kid with the spiky red hair. Maybe. Without looking, it's hard to match faces to voices, or... or names to faces too.

"Tch, shitty Deku. Don't worry about him, he's always been like that." Oboro's frowns, that almost sounds... nice? "Always been a fuckin' freak show."

Ah, never mind. He's never wanted to punch a kid as much as he wants to punch Bakugou.

“Man, you’re always so harsh, Bakubro!”

“Shut up and spar,” Shota snaps at the two of them. “Unless you’d *like* to do some suicide sprints, because I can arrange that.”

If Oboro weren’t feeling so gutted, he probably would’ve laughed at the redhead’s sputtering and Bakugou’s huff of apologetic-bordering-annoyed submission as he launched back into a sparring stance.

The saving grace of Aizawa Shota.

Chapter End Notes

Ah that piece of straw that breaks the camel’s back. Poor sunshine boys. I almost feel bad that I’m putting them though this, but the bads gotta happen before the goods can start. Sorry bb boys.

Just to explain myself a bit, I’ve had Encanto (the newish Disney movie, that I adore) on the brain since I watched it, so the small family business is lowkey based on their cute lil’ fam. Izuku’s got enough shit going on, he needs small victories (his amazing landlord, and the café owners giving him a break). Also, Izuku’s thought process is based on a scenario I’ve spent nights thinking about because I have a habit of imagining scenarios that will never happen and preparing for them anyways. Is it because I’m weird, anxious, or a writer? We’ll never know!

Last scene was suggested by an anonymous commenter: *Helloooo* a couple chapters back? I loved the idea and as soon as I read it, this is what I thought of! So thanks to you for the inspiration, I hope it’s what you were picturing!

As always, thanks for taking the time to read and comment! I'm so grateful you guys are liking this as much as you are!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hellooo, I'm back :)

This chapter definitely isn't 15k words, because I definitely have self control □(^□ ^ ;)□

But on a totally unrelated note, we've hit 100k words on this fic, and I'm so pleased! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter, so it's a long boi. Also, as a side note, I've decided to make Hizashi deaf because deaf Present Mic is perfect. There's some sign language in this chapter, which will be underlined and in *italics*. I don't really know how sign language works, but I have plans of learning because I think it's so cool!

Additional notes at the end if you could be so kind as to read those! Now, wuthout further ado, please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku feels so incredibly stupid as he flees the training gym, making a beeline for the locker room. He wipes furiously at embarrassed tears on his cheeks, sniffling as he tears apart his locker in an attempt to find his school uniform, which is futile considering his hands are shaking and he can hardly think straight. It had taken him three tries to get his combination lock unlocked.

He'd yelled at the ghost. Aloud.

People could hear him. His peers could hear him. His *Sensei* could hear him. He'd yelled at a ghost in front of everyone he knew.

How much had they heard? Had they listened to the whole one-sided conversation? Picked up bits and pieces? Just the end, where he'd been yelling? What had he even yelled? Sensei had sounded pissed, as the snap of Izuku's name had cut through the arguing.

Had he said something bad? Revealed something? He'd been lost in the moment and the emotions, hardly aware of what he'd been saying.

Even now he could hardly keep his thoughts in line.

They'd seen him talking—*yelling*—at nothing. At a ghost who existed

only to him. How was he supposed to come back from this? How was he supposed to show his face in class ever again? At this point there's a small, nagging voice of anxiety in the back of his mind telling him to just drop out of school, which is beyond insane.

He won't, no matter how embarrassed he is. He'd worked far too hard to get here, and he wasn't going to willingly drop it because he'd done something stupid. He tries to push the thought from his head, but it's persistent.

Sure, he was no stranger to embarrassing himself, but this... this was a lot. His whole class had seen him talking to nothing. Having a full-on conversation with thin air. His teacher had physically yelled at him for raising his voice, and only then had he realized that he and Oboro *weren't* alone.

God, he'd really messed this up, hadn't he?

He'd gone so long without being the weird kid who talks to himself. It's not the first time he'd gotten carried away with a ghost—but it is probably his biggest mess up. Seriously, everyone? In front of his whole class and his homeroom Sensei? They're definitely gonna talk about him, and if he knows anything about classmates, kids in general, he knows the rumors are going to spread.

It had been *refreshing*. He didn't have a target on his back, or cruel nicknames that his peers would call out in hopes of getting a reaction from him. He'd just been normal for the first time in his life, and then he'd gone and messed it all up by talking to a ghost. By fighting with a ghost. God, what had his life come too?

Izuku shakes his head in an attempt to neutralize the thoughts, finally pulling out his uniform and changing quickly. There's a good hour until school is finished, and Izuku wonders what Sensei is going to do to him tomorrow for leaving class early without permission. The thought makes him shiver.

He grabs his school bag and flees before anyone can come for him, deciding that whatever punishment he'll get is far better than staying here right now. He can't. He can't do it. Not right now, not yet. He's afraid that Sensei will come looking for him, or worse, a classmate. Maybe even Oboro, and he's not sure he can handle seeing the ghost.

Izuku's slowly starting to feel guilt creeping in along with the anxiety.

Oboro hadn't deserved that. Any of it.

He'd just been angry, and tired. Afraid. He'd let everything build up, bottled it all up and shouldered it alone because he was *alone*. And in the end, it had all come out in a moment of weakness. That final straw that had caused it all to come spewing out.

It wasn't Oboro's fault, not in the slightest, and Izuku feels bad that he'd been the unsuspecting recipient of a week's worth—no, a month's worth, because this certainly hadn't just started, even if that's where it started getting *bad*—of Izuku's shit. The guilt tugs at his heart, and he hopes the ghost will still want to be his friend even after everything. He can't lose another friend—not Oboro.

It was just a case of wrong place, wrong time when it came to Oboro. He'd just been the one to balance that last piece of straw, the piece that broke the camel's back. It hadn't been intentional; purely bad timing.

It had all been steadily piling up.

His mother leaving him without a word—with just a stupid note that Izuku definitely could've lived without. He hates it, but he still can't help but tuck away safely in one of his Analysis notebooks.

Homelessness.

His after-school job; the pressure of needing to work to survive. He had to work. He needed money. This had never been a problem for him—his mother had taken good care of him. It's *hard*.

His classes.

Not to mention his extra training with Sensei too.

Counselling.

One for All and everything that came along with that.

His own Quirk; the ghosts. His doubts about Oboro and their friendship that had all come out in a rush of emotions. The look on the ghost's face would haunt his dreams, he'd been trying not to hurt him, but he had.

He didn't have a second to himself anymore. He didn't have any time to do his homework, and he knew his last few assignments haven't been up to par with everything he'd done prior to his life falling apart around him. He's sure his grades are slipping, but then again, it's not

like he's got a parent to be angry at him for it right?

Izuku drags a fist down his cheek as he steps slowly and quietly through the halls.

Every little thing added a new weight. Big, or small, but weight on his shoulder nonetheless.

It felt like he could hardly stand. It was too much—he was going to topple over under it all. He had toppled over, just now: in class, surrounded by his classmates and his Sensei. They'd seen him break, and he'd just *ran away*.

Because that's what he does, apparently, runs from his problems.

He knew he was falling apart.

He knew he wasn't handling this well—that he was barely even surviving despite the fact he could keep himself fed. Sensei had been right; he was working himself into the ground. Between it all, he'd spread himself to thin somewhere, and now it was starting to crack.

No, those cracks were starting to split into gaping holes that Izuku can't mend on his own.

Izuku drags a rough fist under his eye, blowing out a sigh.

The day had not gone well. This was probably one of the worst days of his life. His morning classes had been alright—no better, nor worse, than they had been all week. He tried to keep focus, and listen, but he was just so tired.

He hadn't had an actual good night sleep since he'd found the eviction notice and fled the apartment without a word to their landlord. The past two nights he'd been sleeping out on the street, behind a dumpster because there wasn't anywhere else to be.

The laundromat manager, a young man not much older than twenty, had shooed him away the second night he'd tried to sleep there again. He'd been kind, and awkward about it, telling him that you couldn't allow him to sleep inside, even if he was washing a pair of socks.

Izuku had swallowed, nodding his head. He'd left the socks there as he walked out, stepping onto the dark streets. It was honestly terrifying being on the streets so late.

He'd always had a curfew, even if his mother was never around to press it—Izuku had always stuck to it.

Izuku jumped at anything that moved. He tucked into himself, keeping a tight grip on his backpack, knuckles tightening to a pale white with each step. He'd been scared.

He knew there were places he could go—homeless shelters. That was always an option, but that would've made it feel real. Having to go to a shelter because he was homeless. And he was, but he still didn't want to believe it.

He'd stumbled upon the isolated alleyway by mistake.

His feet had ached from walking around for hours, and he was so tired. He just wanted to sit down. He'd arrived at the mouth of it, planning to just shuffle in enough that he'd be out of the way. It had just been so quiet; he couldn't help but push further in.

It had seemed perfect—it hadn't smelled, it wasn't incredibly dirty; no more so than anywhere else. He was outside, after all. There was a perfect sized gap for him to tuck himself into, one that hid him away. He was sure no one would be able to spot him, but still, sleep was hard.

Any noise startled him awake. He was afraid to shut his eyes, to be vulnerable in an unfamiliar place, and he was afraid that someone would find him. Afraid he'd fall asleep, only to wake up and find his backpack gone. He was afraid.

But he didn't have a whole lot of options.

He knows the lack of sleep had been hitting him hard.

He could see the worry on everyone's faces, he could see the bubbling questions, and just prayed no one asked him about it. He didn't want to tell anyone. He didn't want to worry anyone. He wasn't going to be a burden on anyone else—not like he had to his mother and father.

It was hard keeping it all to himself though.

He'd almost cracked at weekend training with Sensei. He'd been homeless for two nights at that point, had spent his first official night on the street, relying on a phone alarm to wake him up in time for the training session. He hadn't really been asleep, but his eyes *begged* to be shut.

He'd almost told him that morning, sprawled on the mat as he tried to draw in breaths. It was the safest he'd felt all week, even if he had just been laid out by his teacher's quick reflexes, because he knew his teacher would protect him.

And then Sensei had asked if he was *alright*, and his mouth had gone *dry* and he'd *wanted* to tell him everything—but he *hadn't*. Instead, he'd promised he was fine, which resulted in training being cut short.

And the sad part was, he wasn't even upset about it.

He was tired. He ached. He just wanted to sleep—like actually sleep, dead to the world kind of sleep— but he knew he had to keep pushing if he wanted to be a hero, so he had. He'd pushed until Sensei cut him off. He was almost thankful his teacher had.

He'd left quickly after that, knowing he had to get to the café if he wanted to be able to buy something to eat. LunchRush wasn't at school on the weekends, and he hadn't eaten anything the day prior either.

He knows he'd disappointing his Sensei. He can see it in the man's eyes as he benches him Monday during Hero Training. The look on his Sensei's face had been sour and distastefully when he'd sat Izuku out of practice in front of his peers.

That had been a hit to the pride, and then Oboro had brought it up. The apartment. It was still a sore subject—it had only been three days since he'd left. He didn't know how the ghost knew—he didn't care in the moment to ask—he'd just been so upset; so frustrated.

It was the beginning of the end—his tipping point.

He hadn't even really realized he'd blown up until he was left in the ashes of his own mess, glare softening at the look on the ghost's face, only to be shocked out of his own little world by his Sensei's stern call.

Izuku winces now, in a delayed embarrassment type of way. It's that weird, almost like second-hand embarrassment, which isn't exactly right, because it is still his embarrassment, just all over again.

The teen sucks in a breath as he moves slowly through the halls. He needs to get out of here. He needs to leave. He can't stay here right now, not after that.

It's not hard sneaking out of Yuuei as one might expect from the world-renowned school. He hopes it's hard sneaking in than it is sneaking out.

With most teachers and students in class, he barely sees anyone in the hallways. And no one pays him any mind, busy with their own school work. Those few students in the hall, whether getting drinks, or going to the washroom, barely glance at him, and he's never been more thankful to be ordinary.

The boy pushes out the door, blowing out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding in. He slips in hands into his pockets, slumping as he moves down the long sidewalk before passing out the Yuuei gates.

He knows he's gonna be early, but he hopes the kind woman who'd given him his job won't mind him starting early— he doesn't even care if he gets paid for the extra work or not, he just needs something to occupy his time and take his mind off of *everything*.

Oboro hadn't meant to follow Izuku. He really hadn't.

He just knows he can't stay in Shota's class watching them spar— knowing that Izuku was supposed to be there as well. He hates to see his friend like that-- hates even more to know he'd aided in Izuku being gone. Had he been too harsh on the teen? Gotten *too* involved, *too* worried?

He'd never really thought about the fact It's so easy for him to overstep. That line had blurred years ago—he was polite about where he went, and what he did. He had boundaries. There were lines that shouldn't be crossed whether you're alive, or dead, but he still didn't really have boundaries like living people do. Had he overstepped in Izuku's life?

He doesn't even know. He'd always been like this—fiercely protective and close with his friends. You can ask Shota and Hizashi, who'd both been on the receiving end of his affection. It's just who he was. But he knows he'd stepped on their feet sometime too, Shota mostly, who Izuku reminded him very much of. That stern, *stupid*, mindset of *its me versus the world*, which it totally doesn't have to be.

Together, he and Hizashi had eased Shota out of that, not completely, because he was still, and always would be, a stubborn idiot, but he was a lot better than he had been when they'd cornered the shy, angry-faced transfer into being their friend.

But how was he going to do that with Izuku? He was a ghost. He hardly even existed. He didn't have backup in the form of Hizashi's charming grin and loud friendly attitude.

The ghost gives a huffed, suffering sigh as he fists his hands into his pockets, shoulders slumping tiredly. He'd left the training gym shortly after Izuku, but he didn't dare go after the teen. He gets the feeling he's not Izuku's favorite person right now.

He thinks about finding Hizashi, sitting with him and just enjoying his friend's presence as he teaches, but then he catches sight of Izuku leaving the school, and watches him from the window as he walks down the pathway.

He's worried still.

Of course, he is.

Izuku is his friend, no matter what Izuku thinks. No matter how royally he'd messed up, he's honestly does consider Izuku to be one of his closest friends.

He'll need to prove that at some point, but for now he just wants to make sure the younger teen is alright.

He keeps his distance, doesn't get to close.

It's hard, because no one usually sees him. Distance doesn't matter so long as he doesn't step into anyone's personal space, but with Izuku, the teen can *see* him. Hear him. If Izuku turned to look back, he'd see Oboro following him, and the ghost really doesn't want to get caught following him after their spat in the gym.

He doesn't ever want to fight with Izuku like that again. He's not sure his ghost heart can take it.

He follows silently, keeping out of sight, but Izuku doesn't even turn to look. To be fair, when he's not talking, Oboro is silent. There's no ruffle of clothing, or soft noises of breathing. His feet don't slap on the pavement because he's weightless. When he's not avidly trying to make noise, he makes no sounds at all.

So really, there's no reason for Izuku to look back. He's still cautious though

Izuku walks silently towards the train station, then waits after

purchasing his ticket to his usual stop, the one a couple blocks away from his apartment—*the* apartment. His old apartment.

With that in mind, Oboro doesn't bother getting on the train too; that's a risk of being seen that he doesn't necessarily need, so instead he pops up at the other end of the line, and waits there to see the familiar head of forest green hair getting off the train.

It's not a long train ride, twenty-minutes, maybe twenty-five. Yuuei is pretty secluded, and on the other side of town from Izuku's neighborhood, so it actually makes good time considering walking would've been upwards of an hour from Izuku's front door to Yuuei's entrance gates.

Izuku gets off, and for the first time since he'd seen the rush of red lift to his cheeks, and the genuine fear in the teenager's eyes, Oboro looks at his face.

He looks a bit more awake, not as tired as before, but you can easily see the building exhaustion. He wants to wrap the teen in a blanket and make him sleep for fifteen hours straight.

Izuku's eyes are red, like he'd been crying, and he probably has. Oboro's seen him cry before, but he'd be lying if he said it didn't stab through his heart like dagger. He'd made the teen cry. Not intentionally, but still. If Oboro hadn't have opened his mouth, then Izuku wouldn't have either, and they wouldn't be in this mess.

Besides the red-rimmed eyes, slumping exhaustion, and almost permanent downward curl of his lips, the teen doesn't look too bad. He doesn't look great, but he could definitely look worse.

Izuku doesn't linger, steps away steadily in that way you only can if you've walked it hundreds of times. He follows after him, watching as Izuku turns down a different road that he's unfamiliar with. He feels stupid for assuming Izuku was going to the apartment, because obviously he can't.

The ghost bites his lip, keeping his distance, but staying close enough as to not lose sight of the younger boy.

He turns suddenly, into a door hidden on the side of building. Oboro edges closer, glancing in the window where he sees Izuku greet some people. He stalls for a second, a nervous flush on his cheeks as he waves his hands like he's promising something to the old lady behind the counter— *'No, no,'* Oboro can imagine him saying, *'I'm fine!'* but

he's definitely not, and he's not fooling anyone if by the way the woman's eyes narrow as she says something else to him is anything to go off.

It looks like Izuku laughs as he says something Oboro can't really see, shaking his head before shooting her a sheepish smile that has the woman shaking her head and gesturing to the door off to the side of the room.

Izuku bows his head gratefully, before ducking into the door, only to return a second later with an apron tired around his waist. His bag, and Yuuei blazer jacket had stripped off, as well as the tie, leaving him in just a white button-up and his school slacks.

It takes a second longer than Oboro would ever admit to realize that this must be Izuku's job. The job that had taken up so much of the teenager's time, but now he understands why. Izuku was trying to survive any way he could. He was trying to keep his head above water while everything in his life tugged at his feet.

There's a smile on the boy's face as he makes a beeline for one of the little tables where two people are sitting together, waiting to be served, but it's so fake it looks almost wrong on his face. It doesn't match his tired eyes.

Oboro stays there for a while. He's not really sure how long, just peeking in the café. Izuku doesn't notice him, never even glances towards the window between his work and talking to customers and the rest of the staff.

Oboro leans against the wall beside the window, turned just perfectly so he can watch what's going on inside the small café. The bustling of coffees and warm drinks being served—Izuku milling around behind the counter with the machines, talking to customers, cleaning and waiting on tables.

Before long the boy disappears back into that room, and comes out dressed in his uniform once more. His yellow backpack is grasped in his hands as he makes his way to where the old woman is wiping a table.

She hands the boy something— money, maybe?— and he bows his head thankfully in return. Oboro ducks out of the window as the boy turns to leave, and he pushes himself into the wall completely when Izuku steps out of the small café.

Oboro watches Izuku stuff the money into his pocket as he steps onto the street. It's later now, the sun's starting to set and a chilly breeze sweeps over them. Following the money, his hands shove into his pockets as well, and he starts to walk, shoulder slumping like someone had flipped a switch that drained all of Izuku's energy.

It makes him sad to see.

This kid was only fifteen-years-old, and he was already so good at forcing himself to be okay until he had the *time* to break apart. It comes with being a hero, Oboro knows, but Izuku isn't a hero yet, and this is a *learned* trait. He'd learned this, and it had nothing to do with being a hero.

Izuku walks for a while, steps slow and sluggish. He slipped his backpack on, but clutched at the straps like he was afraid someone would swipe it from him if he didn't. The kid turns off into a darkened alleyway. He glances around before pushing back towards the end—a dead end with a dumpster pushed up against a wall.

Oboro watches as the kid unzips his bag, pulling out a sweatshirt. He pulls it on with a relieved breath before finally wedging himself in between the wall and the dumpster, making sure his backpack is hidden and blocked in for protection.

Oboro's mouth feels dry as he watches from afar.

Izuku was staying here. This was where Izuku was living. This was... the kid was living beside a dumpster. The kid was living beside a dumpster and no one *knew*.

Oboro can't let his happen—he can't just leave Izuku to live by a dumpster. It wasn't safe. He wasn't safe.

He'd have to do something about this.

Shota had seen a lot of things on his patrols.

Logical things, illogical things. Weird things, odd things, normal things, regular things. He'd seen things that don't make sense, and things that made perfect sense, but... he's never seen *this*.

The street light before him was flickering.

Now, that in itself wasn't weird.

Street lights flickered. That happens, and there's many causes for a flickering street light.

Power surges.

Dying bulbs.

Outages.

The list goes on.

There are many answers to a street light flickering.

What wasn't normal, however, was the light flickering until he drew near, before shutting off completely. Shutting off completely only when he was underneath the light source.

He'll admit he played around with a little. Tested it. This was something you needed to see to believe, and even seeing it now, he doesn't believe it entirely. It's not logical. He lives his life on logic, and this, this isn't.

But it's happening anyways, so he's obviously going to investigate this phenomenon.

The light would be bright. Had almost blinded him from where he'd been perched on the edge of a rooftop. Shining, showing no sign of shutting off at all, and when he'd glance at it scoping out where he was heading next, it would start flickering.

Like clockwork, it kept repeating. He'd look away and it would be bright, then he'd look back, and it would flicker. Away, bright. Back, flickers.

It felt like the light was trying to draw him in. It wanted his attention with was *insanely illogical*. An inanimate street light trying to draw in his attention? He felt like an idiot even thinking it.

Still, it was not normal.

So, he'd stepped up to see what was up with it. Street lights don't do that. Not normally.

To his surprise, when he'd stepped up to inspect it, the light went out completely. There was no warning it was going to go off. No flicker as it tried to conserve energy, and it didn't look like it was trying to turn back on. It just... went out, like something had blown in its wiring.

There'd been no noise, or sound of sparks that usually entailed something electrical malfunctioning. Besides the obvious fact it was out, it didn't look like it *should* be out.

Again, there were reasons this could happen.

Nothing happened without reason.

Maybe a wire had gotten lose? The bulb had died? Maybe a breaker was down somewhere and... well, maybe not that one. It appeared that only this specific light was off. The hero leaned to look around the light, inspecting it for any damage or loose wires, but he could see nothing.

But then again, he was in the dark because the light was off. He had good eyes, but he wasn't a raccoon, or a cat or something. He didn't have night vision; therefore, without the light overhead, he really couldn't be certain it wasn't malfunctioning for a reason.

The man shook his head before he glared up at the blacked-out bulb.

He just had to assume it had gone out. That was the most logical reason he was stood in the dark after a flickering bulb had drawn him in.

A dead bulb wasn't something to be overly worried about though.

They went out all the time. Half the street lights on his patrol were out because they were in places the general population tended not to go. A dead bulb wasn't out of the ordinary for an underground hero to see, lights being on were honestly more surprising.

The man scoffed to himself, shaking his head.

The absurdity.

Shota turned away from the street light, capture weapon lifting off his shoulders to coil around a fire escape close by so he could pull himself up except—the light was back on. The surprise of suddenly being in the light made him jump, and when he spun back around with gritted teeth, the light abruptly went out again.

His capture weapon dropped back over his shoulders in his confusion, gaze sweeping over the area to try and spot something—anything that could be messing around with him. He didn't see any electrical boxes, nor did he see a soul out here with him.

So... the light wasn't dead after all?

There was something very, very weird about this.

In nothing more than an attempt to test if he was actually losing his mind, Shota turned away a second time, and as expected, the light was back on. He lingered for a second, hand gripping his scarf to see if it was just randomly flickering, and he'd just had some insanely impeccable timing, but the light didn't flicker, or waver, or go out again, *until* he turned to face the light again.

He blinks slowly. Trying to understand. This was... it was *weird*. It wasn't normal. Lights don't do this, and certainly not to him.

Sure, their lights back at the apartment flicker sometimes. They'll go out, and turn back on, but never like this. Honestly, Shota chalked that up to faulty wiring or their building have odd power surges—and he won't deny it's not funny when Hizashi turns a light off, only for it to turn back on just as he sits down again, or vice versa.

Hizashi swears up and down that their apartment is haunted, but the idea of ghosts is illogical.

It's just something that's always happened to them. Way back when, when they'd first moved in together, and through the years. Once, maybe twice a week something would do something weird. Odd, but nothing to be concerned about.

But it's never been like this. Never as precise as this, and never anything as worthwhile as a full street light. The best he'd seen was their kitchen light flickering out before turning back on, and the lamp in the living room turning on and off. Shota's only seen that a couple times, however. Hizashi claims it happens often.

Still, he can't come up with a logical excuse for why this light is doing this.

Shota tucks his hands into his capture weapon as he stares up at the light. It's off still, but it had turned on just seconds earlier. The light definitely isn't dead if it's still turning on. The question is, why is it turning on? Or, better yet, why had it turned off to begin with?

He glances to the left, noticing the street light off to the side shining brightly, undisturbed, before glancing to the right where it's—wait, is it flickering?

The light overhead stays out, but the one to the right flickers just as the one he's stood under had in order to draw in his attention.

Surely this much be a hoax.

With furrowed brows, the hero steps towards the flickering street light. The light he was just under turns back on abruptly. He glances back, but carries on towards the new light that flickers more intently as he gets closer.

Like before, as soon as he's basked in the light, it shuts off abruptly.

This is illogical. He's following street lights like they're trying to lead him somewhere.

What the hell?

The light to the right of the new one he's under flickers again, repeating the process once more. Something really wants him to follow the lights. He's definitely being led somewhere.

But by what? Who?

Was this some Quirk? A trap? Was he walking into some villain's scheme right now?

Even if he is, he can't in good conscious ignore light sources leading him along in the dead of night, now can he? Even if it's not the greatest idea to follow along; play into whatever this is, he's intrigued.

Deciding to throw caution to the wind in that way Hizashi absolutely hates, the dark-haired hero shoves his hands in his pockets and starts walking in the direction the flickering lights are leading him.

The flickering has sped up now, as he walks. They'll flicker once, maybe twice as he approaches, before shutting off completely and leaving him in the dark as if someone's flipped a light switch as soon as steps foot in the flow of said light. If he doesn't stop, neither does the lights, which turn back on as soon as he's passed the actual bulb overhead, which is when the next starts flickering.

It all moves fluidly. Each of his steps is accompanied by the light either flickering, shutting off, or turning back on. Something is tracking his distance; unsettlingly accurate with the lights so it matches perfectly with him.

Honestly, he's impressed by the dedication if this is a villain trying to lead an unsuspecting hero into a trap.

He follows the street lights for a good half an hour. He's slower on foot than he would've been on rooftop, but the lights are insistent, and he's unsure if this will still work if he's not directly under them. They'd stayed on the main road up until this point. He'd followed the lights left and right depending, but they didn't stray from the main roads.

The street light he's stood under is turning on and off slowly, and the next one town the line doesn't flicker. He turns looks to the left, a sluggish on and off overhead, then to the right, on and off again, before turning to look behind him.

The light turns off.

Behind him is an alley opening. It's dark, no street lights down the path. He's sure if there were light sources, it would've kept leading him.

It feels like a trap.

He's no longer on his patrol route—hasn't been for a good twenty minutes now. He'd blindly followed the lights that had appeared to be leading him along. He has half a mind to believe he'd imagined the whole thing, but here he stands, at the mouth of an unfamiliar backstreet.

The light above him flickers lazily as if prompting him on, and a chill climbs up his spine as he looks back towards the alley opening when the light's gone off again.

When he takes a step in, the light comes back on. He glances back at it again, but it doesn't flicker again. The beam is steady and uninterrupted.

That... that had happened, right?

Shaking his head as he fists his hands into his capture weapon in case this really is a trap of some sort, the man sneaks in. He's silent as his steps carry him in. He's not sure what he's expecting to find. He doesn't even know if he'll find anything.

The alley way is silent; that dead of night kind of silent. His steps are the only thing heard, soft and steady. He tightens his fist, clenching

his fingers around his scarf until his knuckles turn white. He's waiting for something to jump out at him. For something to attack, or flee.

But nothing comes.

By the time he reaches the end of the alley, a dead end, the man feels like he really had been punked. By his own brain. What the hell? Had that really happened? It was completely illogical, but it had been entirely real. He was sure of it.

Shota surveys the dead end with a heavy frown, looking for something, anything, out of place. Is there anything here that doesn't belong here? Anything worthy of the street lights leading him here?

Something moves in his peripherals, and he's quick to jump, scarf flying overhead, ready to neutralize any potential threat. It drops abruptly back to his shoulders when he notices sneakers. Red sneakers. Familiar red sneakers, but he can't quite put his finger on where he'd seen them before.

It's not just the shoes—attached to those red sneakers are feet, and attached to those are legs. Shota's sure there's the rest of the human there too, but they're hidden; wedged in between the wall and the dumpster.

He comes into contact with the homeless a lot. Life hasn't been kind to a lot of people. He knows some Pros turn their head and pretend not to see it, but he likes to check in. And... well, when he finds people unconscious in alleyways, he likes to ensure they're not dead.

Shota moves towards the person, trying to make himself as loud as possible to announce his presence without being overly loud as to scare the shit out of them. He stomps his boots just a little louder than he usually would, but the person doesn't stir.

Probably not good.

"Hey," Shota calls, leaning closer. The person's head is tucked in a hook, angled downward. He can't see their face. But he catches sight of a bright yellow backpack pressed between the wall and this person's body.

The figure is small and—

Shota freezes.

A bright yellow backpack?

Bright red sneakers?

A wave of panic rushes through him as he grabs one of the person's shoes, giving it a light shake, "hey," he calls again more urgent this time. It's just now Shota's eyes zero in on the familiar Yuuei uniform slacks, as well as a rumpled up white uniform shirt peeking out from under the bright sweatshirt.

Oh God, this really is his Problem Child.

What the hell was Midoriya doing sleeping on the street?

Feeling more confident that he knows this person, and also needing the proof that this is his Problem Child even if everything pointed towards *yes, it was Midoriya Izuku sleeping in a dark, dirty alleyway*, the man pushed the hood back off the small frame's head, sucking in a breath as he does so.

Curls of dark green spring up from under the hood, and with the hood gone, the man can make out the dusting of Midoriya's freckles even in the awful night lighting—and there's no doubt this isn't one of his kids. His Problem Child.

All Shota can do is whisper out profanities under his breath as he scans for any injuries on his face.

"Midoriya," he calls again, hoping his name with stir him better than 'hey' had. The kid doesn't move, and for a second, Shota's body goes ridged. Fear pulses down his spine as he leans forwards, tapping the kid's cheek with urgency. "Midoriya, hey, up and at 'em, Kid. C'mon."

The last he'd seen the boy had been that afternoon when he'd rushed out of the gym without a word. He'd been fine—well, mostly fine. Unharmed, at least. Shota won't pretend to know why Izuku was so upset, and he hasn't the slightest clue what he'd been yelling at.

He'd come to know Izuku as a mumbler; a child who would mutter to himself, so when he'd glanced over to see the kid's mouth moving, he didn't really think anything of it. But then he'd shouted—and Shota had been surprised. The angry yell from the green-haired teen had startled the class, drawing in curious eyes from all around, and the only thing he could think of to do was to snap the kid out of whatever he was doing had been to call his name loudly.

Midoriya had left right after, and as much as Shota wanted to chase after him, to get an explanation, he still had a class to teach and students to be responsible for. There comes a point when you're a teacher working with young people, where you need to back off and let them go— even if he's a little annoyed the problem child just ran out without a word.

He'd been fine when he'd left class though. Tired, and unfocused, but fine.

Shota's taps on the teen's cheek gets more persistent. "Midoriya, I'm five seconds away from calling for an ambulance. Wake up, Problem Child."

The kid stirs, thank the heavens, groggily curling into himself tighter before unfurling and blinking slow, owlish eyes at him. He reaches up to rub at his eye with a white, probably frozen fist, before cocking his head as if trying to gage the situation in his tired state.

"Sensei?" his voice is curled with sleep, tired and drawled. He shivers, tucking into the sweatshirt.

Shota sits back on his haunches where he's still crouched beside the boy. His heart is still pounding anxiously in his chest, but with the kid conscious and speaking, he can let out a slow, anxious breath.

His student, one of *his* kids, hadn't woken up right away. He's not sure if it's because of how exhausted the boy had been looking recently, the cold night air, or something else entirely, but there's still warning bells going off in his head as he watches the kid sharply.

It's just a second later that the kid jerks up abruptly, arms tightening around himself as he gapes nervously at his teacher. It seems he'd come to his senses finally. The sleep is wiped away and replaced with a familiar anxiety. "S-Sensei?!"

"Midoriya," Shota replies blankly, frowning at the teen.

He has questions. Lots of them. But Midoriya has been out in the evening chill for who knows how long, he'd been asleep on the ground, his cheeks and nose an irritated red from the freezing breeze sweeping over them. His first course of action is getting him somewhere warm.

"Sensei, uhm." the boy winces at his own voice, pulling into himself like he's afraid Shota might attack him, "w-what are you, I mean,

uhm, why are... what're you doing here?"

"*I* was on patrol," the man huffs as he stands back up, looming over the child with a glare, "what are *you* doing here, alone in a dead-end alley at two AM?"

The question is a trap, and Izuku sees through it instantly. He's smart, Shota will give him that... then again, the kid's asleep on the streets, so can he *really* give him that? Not a complete idiot then.

The kid bites his lip and drops his attention down to his feet. Midoriya's stiff fingers fiddle with his shoelaces, and Shota decides right then that they're not going to get anywhere right now. The kid's obviously tired, and cold, and probably hungry. He wouldn't want to talk either if roles were reversed.

"Up," he demands with a shake of his head.

He gives the teen props for how fast he flies to his feet, clutching his backpack to his chest. Shota gestures the kid out from his hiding spot easily, and Midoriya scampers past him. The teenager pauses by Shota's side, waiting for direction. "Where..." he swallows, biting the inside of his cheek, "where are we going?"

"Does it matter, Kid?" Shota asks tiredly, reaching up to tuck his hands in his capture weapon again. The wind nips at his fingers; its freezing cold, and he can only imagine how cold the teen must be after who knows how long out here "any where's better than here."

Midoriya is silent, thoughtful at his side.

Shota takes a couple steps before stopping, glancing back at the kid.

He'd been around teenagers long enough to read his expression easily, so, with a heavy sigh, the man explains, "my place, Midoriya. I'll take you to my place for the night, because I sure as hell am not leaving you here. Unless, of course, you have somewhere else to be, in which case I'll walk you there."

He studies the teen, watched his body movements and facial expressions. How his fingers tense around the fabric of his backpack, how his lips curl downward before pressing into a straight line. He doesn't have anywhere to go, it's all in his body movements.

"I... I don't," Midoriya's curls block his eyes when he ducks his head. "N-nowhere else to go..."

At least the kid hadn't lied to him. The teacher nods, acknowledging his student's honest answer.

"C'mon then," Shota huffs out, hoping his voice comes out a bit more inviting than he thinks it does. Still, at this point he knows his students are used to his hardened personality—or, lack thereof. "You okay to walk? It's a bit of a trek from here."

Shota looks around to try and gage where they are exactly. He's not entirely familiar with this part of town, since he had strayed off his patrol, but he's got a basic idea of where they are, and he's confident he can get them to the apartment. It just might take a bit longer on foot.

"Y-yes, Sensei," Midoriya nods quickly, "I'm fine."

He's getting tired of hearing that from the kid. *This* obviously isn't *fine*. But he can tell Midoriya that another time. Preferably after he's fed, warmed and rested. Then he'll ask questions and lecture some sense into him.

They step out of the alley side by side, and Shota shoots a glance over his shoulder at the street lights. They're all shining brightly, each and every one of them that had flickered before shutting off. There's no trace of any residual flickering. The man furrows his brow as he tightens his grip in his capture weapon.

Had that even happened at all? How'd he... how the hell did he find Midoriya?

He shakes himself from his thoughts, looking back at the child.

Midoriya's hands are shoved in his pockets now, hood tugged back up. He's wearing his backpack; hunched over in exhaustion. The kid blows out slow breaths that fog up into to the cool night air. He gives a shiver that seems to vibrate his whole frame, before curling in on himself even more.

Shota hates to see his students like this—he'd hate to see any of them in the state Midoriya is in, but there's just something so heartbreaking about his happy-go-lucky Problem Child so quiet and timid.

"C'mon, Problem Child," Shota shakes his head, stepping towards the kid so he could press his fingers between the kid's shoulder blades, just above the backpack, in a guiding gesture. Shota's silently pleased the kid doesn't flinch away from him, at least that trust is still here.

Midoriya doesn't pull away from the touch, so neither does Shota. He just presses his hand closer to the kid, flattening it so his palm presses firmly, grounding him, against the teenager.

With his other hand, the man pulls his cellphone out of one of his utility belt pouches, texting a one-handed message to his husband as a bit of warning. He knows Hizashi won't care, he'd been just as worried about the green-haired teenager as he was.

'I'm bringing home a stray.'

He gets a single thumbs up emoji in reply just seconds later.

Content with the answer, Shota drops his phone back into the pouch before glancing over at the kid.

They walk side by side, not slow by any means, but not as fast as Shota could've been had he been up on the rooftops. Still, Midoriya's tired, and he doesn't trust the kid enough to use his Quirk to keep speed, nor is Midoriya even allowed to use his Quirk outside of school without his provisional license.

So, he settles into the long walk.

They don't talk—not really. Shota isn't one for pointless conversation, and Midoriya is worryingly quiet as well. It's different from the rambles and mutters the boy usually has. He's not sure he likes it.

They make it to the apartment, and Shota leads the teenager up the stairs and down the hallway—pulling his house key from one of his pouches to unlock the door. They step inside and he locks it once again.

He hears Hizashi's footsteps before he sees the man.

Shota has to shake his head when his husband rounds the corner of their apartment, tired smile jolting into a gape of surprise. Hizashi's eyebrows shoot up, jaw dropping as he freezes abruptly at the sight the stray in question, a teenager, toeing his shoes off, partially hidden behind Shota.

Shota doesn't think his husband knows who it is yet.

That's not a cat. His charming, intelligent husband signs dumbly, wide eyes locked on the child. Midoriya's head is still ducked, his upper body hidden behind Shota. He's fiddling with his shoes—Shota doesn't

even have to see it to know. Still, he'll gladly accept the second of distraction as he eyes his husband in silent warning.

Shota shakes his head with a knowing look. It takes a second for Hizashi to manage to draw his shock back up to Shota, but when they catch a second of eye contact, Hizashi drops his gaze down to Shota's hands for a signed reply of: *I know.*

His husband shoots him a dirty look at the incredibly unhelpful reply, lip poking out in a pout. *What did you do?*

Shota raises an eyebrow, blowing out a light huff, *I found him on the streets.*

Hizashi's shock bleeds into concern, eyebrows furrowing as he glances down at the child, *at 2 AM?*

The dark-haired man gives a nod as Midoriya finally stands up again. He signs a quick *tell you later* to his husband before turning his attention back to the child. Midoriya's shoes are off, pushed politely against the wall in an orderly fashion. He doesn't move, but glances just a little around Shota to eye Hizashi.

Shota kicks off his own boots, toeing them against the wall haphazardly.

Shota sees the exact moment Hizashi figures out who he'd brought home. The surprise from earlier is nothing compared to the shock on his face now as he stares at Midoriya's still weather nipped red cheeks and nose. Shota knows his husband has a soft spot for the kid, he honestly doesn't know of anyone who *doesn't.*

"C'mon, Kid." Shota invites Midoriya in. As he speaks to Midoriya, his signs to Hizashi just so they're on the same page without the kid hearing. *Guest room?*

Hizashi stares at his hands for just a second before seeming to decipher the signs and their meaning. He nods, turning on his heels to prepare the guest bedroom, and probably grab his hearing aids for Midoriya's sake. The kid hadn't seemed to catch on to the signing yet, but it was only a matter of time.

"Who, uhm," Shota looks down at the boy inching along behind him, "who was that, Sensei?"

Shota raises an eyebrow, a smirk curling onto his lips. Ah yes...

without his obnoxious voice, and that stupid cockatoo hairstyle, no one knew that Hizashi was Present Mic. Shota reigns in the humored grin, regarding the teen with a schooled look, “my husband.”

Midoriya blinks once, then twice.

It’s probably a surprise. Shota wouldn’t be shocked if his students thought he was single. It’s not like he ever talked about himself around them, and he didn’t wear his wedding band on his finger just because it was risky to announce something like that. Most heroes tended to keep their personal lives on the downlow, and never showed, or spoke of loved ones. He and Hizashi were no different, especially at school, or in their hero costumes where they’re easily recognizable—well, Hizashi is, at least.

Besides he preferred they think he was single, less stupid questions that way.

And he didn’t want them prying into his personal life—he got enough of that from Nemuri and the other teachers. They all knew he and Hizashi were married, yet still, he never got a moments peace.

“O-oh,” the teen exhales the word softly, head bowing in a thoughtful little nod. “Okay.”

Shota raises an eyebrow before shaking his head, “you must be cold. And dirty, I don’t want to catching anything from that alley either. Why don’t you head into the bathroom and take a shower to warm up?”

Midoriya bites his bottom lip, looking conflicted. He clutches his backpack to his chest, but Shota doesn’t say anything about it. He wonders how long his kid had been on the streets without him noticing.

“Are you sure?” the boy asks slowly, almost nervously.

“Yeah,” Shota lulls his head in Midoriya’s direction, “you don’t have too, of course. I’m not going to force you, but we will be talking—either after you shower or right now.”

Izuku stiffens at that, glancing down the hallway.

“Your call, Problem Child,” the man muses, “we talk now, or you can have a couple minutes in the shower to get your answers straight. Doesn’t matter to me.”

“Shower?” the teen decides with a light frown.

“Good choice,” Shota nods, gesturing him down the hallway Hizashi had disappeared down before crossing his arms over his chest. “First door on your left down that hallway. Feel free to use whatever you want in there, we don’t mind. Clean towels are under the sink. You got any clean clothes in there to change into?”

Midoriya nods sharply, clutching tighter around the bag. Shota pretends not to notice. “Good. I’ll make us something to eat while you shower. Anything specific you’d like?”

“Oh, uh y-you don’t have too—”

“Anything specific you’d like?” Shota repeats, cutting the kid off. He tries to keep his exasperated tone to himself. At this, the teen shakes his head meekly. “No allergies?” There’s none on his school records, but then again, Midoriya also hadn’t had a Quirk before school started, and that also wasn’t on his record.

The kid shakes his head a second time, fidgeting with his own fingers.

“Alright,” Shota huffs softly, “off you go then. We’ll talk while we eat. I have questions, and you should have answers.”

The kid looks nervous at that, but nods anyways. He turns swiftly and disappears into the bathroom, the door clicking shut behind him. Shota lets out a sigh, running his fingers through his hair. He takes off his capture weapon, letting it pool on the coffee table for the cats to sniff.

He hears the water turn on in the bathroom, before making his way into the kitchen.

“Mind telling me what the hell is going on?” Hizashi’s voice almost startles him. When he looks back, his husband has his hearing aids in, and his hair has been brushed up into a messy bun. “Why is Midoriya here? Why was he out at 2 AM? Where did you find him?”

“We’re about to find out,” Shota huffs, silently happy the chef of the apartment is joining him, he’d hate to serve the kid something burnt. “Now, come, help me make him something to eat. I... I don’t think he’s been eating well recently.”

A concerned frown tugs at Hizashi’s lips, but he does as requested, settling beside Shota at the counter to help him make a very late

dinner.

A lot had happened in the past hour.

He'd been caught.

He'd been caught sleeping on the ground, hidden away in a dead-end alleyway. He'd been caught being homeless by his homeroom teacher. Of course, it was Aizawa-Sensei who'd found him. Of course.

Izuku's hands shake as he locks himself in his teacher's bathroom, eyes surveying curiously over everything in there. It feels weird to be in his Sensei's home—his Sensei's space.

Izuku bites his lip as he sets his schoolbag down onto the counter, unzipping it to dig out a pair of sweats and a long sleeve shirt. He hadn't grabbed any pajamas in his hasten to get out of his apartment after finding the eviction notice, and it's not like he'd change into pajamas on the streets anyways.

He fishes out a fresh pair of boxers, shaking his head as he reaches underneath the sink like Sensei had instructed, where he finds towels, just as promised. With everything laid out, Izuku turns to start the faucet, studying it for a second to understand how it works before finally turning it on.

The water patters on the floor of the shower, but Izuku makes no move to undress.

"Y'know," he fiddles with the edge of his hoodie, pulling on a loose thread, "it's weird that Sensei found me even when I was completely hidden in a dark, isolated alley, isn't it?"

"Yeah, uhm weird..." He hears someone clear their throat, proving his suspicion to be right. Izuku turns on socked feet, regarding the ghost with a frown. Oboro looks nervous, shuffling his feet as he chews on the inside of his cheek. "Actually, uh, about that... I... I sorta followed you?"

"I've gathered," Izuku shakes his head, giving the ghost an unamused look. There's no anger in it—he's over being angry. Too tired for it. He continues on, voice bland and holding no heat, "I told you not too."

"I know," Oboro winces, squeezing his eyes shut like he'd committed the ultimate betrayal. "But I was worried about you. You just left

class, and I know we're fighting, but I'm still worried, because you are my friend. And I saw you go into the alley, and I knew that you were staying there, and I got this really gross feeling in my stomach, like someone walked through me but worse and I-I couldn't just leave you out there, Izuku. I couldn't. I'm sorry, but it's dangerous on the streets, especially at night and I knew Shota would help you as soon as he knew, but I knew you wouldn't tell him and... I'm *sorry*."

"We're not fighting anymore," Izuku shakes his head, pulling the sweater over his head before setting it on the closed toilet seat. "I'm sorry too. I don't think *we* ever were fighting, just... just *I* was. That was unfair of me. You didn't deserve that—I mean, I'm not happy you were snooping around, or that you followed me even when I told you not too, but I get it. I... I would've done the same thing too for a friend. I'm... I'm sorry I yelled at you."

"Don't be sorry!" the ghost yelps, rubbing the back of his neck, "I totally did deserve it. Sometimes I forget I'm a ghost and that some of the stuff I do is overstepping—that it's... well, that it's stuff living people can't do. I really was just going to check on you, but then I saw your landlord and a moving crew in your apartment and... yeah."

"You did overstep," Izuku agrees softly, but with a tiny smile. He knows he can't hold it against the ghost—he probably doesn't even realize he's doing it. Izuku gets that this is a trial-and-error kinda thing, because no one else sees ghosts like he does. "But I know you didn't mean to. It's... it's okay. Mostly. Try and remember living people restrictions every now and then, yeah?"

"Trust me," Oboro smiles, but it's not the wide one Izuku is used to seeing, "I don't want a repeat of this, I'll be trying extremely hard to not, uhm, not *ghost* in your business."

There's a moment of silence, not quite uncomfortable, but there's not as much tension as when the ghost had first peeked in.

"I think," the ghost starts off slowly, "uhm, maybe we should talk more sometime. Preferably when your teacher isn't waiting on you. You're already in for a talk, eh?"

"Don't remind me," Izuku pouts, "I can't believe you—*wait*, how did you lead Sensei to me? You're a ghost."

Oboro lets out a breathy laugh, looking tired as he rubs at the back of his neck, "tell you later?"

“So long as you actually tell me,” Izuku teases, voice curled with humor instead of the frustration he’d had back in the training gym at school. Oboro seems to notice that too, because he’s grinning, nodding his head vigorously. “I trust you too though.”

Izuku lets a small smile curl onto his lips at the way Oboro’s face brightens with relief. Maybe he’d taken that fight more to heart than Izuku had thought. He’d never really had a friend like this—not since before he’d gotten his medical diagnosis. It's nice.

Getting back to the task at hand, Izuku strips off his socks. He glances down at the remainder of his clothes, biting his lip as he glances back at the ghost.

He hopes the running water is muffling the sound of his voice as he speaks with the ghost, but at this point, he’d already embarrassed himself enough. What’s one more embarrassing thing in front of his Sensei?

“So, Sensei’s married, huh?”

Oboro grins at that, nodding his head because Izuku’s already seen that. He’d gotten confirmation from Sensei already. It’s not a question, it’s an observation framed like a question.

“I never even thought he was seeing anyone, let alone married. He’s so secretive, hardly ever talks about himself, y’know? Who’s his husband anyways? He looked... familiar, but I can’t figure out why?”

“Not to be cryptic,” Oboro cocks his head, tongue in cheek as he smiles, “but you’ll definitely figure that one out on your own. Give it a couple minutes.”

Izuku puckers his lips in feigned annoyance before turning away from his friend, “I feel bad wasting water while we’re talking. I should probably, y’know,” the teen gestures to the running shower.

Oboro gives a hum, but clearly doesn’t catch on. He doesn’t make any move to leave, hadn’t even seemed to connect the dots.

Izuku snorts a laugh, angling his attention back to the ghost as he unbuttons his school shirt, “I’m gonna get naked now, sooo unless you’re *that* kinda ghost: get out.”

“R-right!” Oboro yelps, cheeks flushing brightly as he takes a couple steps backwards—right through the locked door, so just his head is

peeking in once again, “oh, right, sorry, uhm. Yikes. I’ll be, um... enjoy your shower.”

Izuku laughs, throwing a wave over his shoulder as the ghost leaves him be.

He strips the rest of his clothes, stepping under the warm stream of water that makes him shiver after being cold for so long. It feels so nice. He hadn’t had a chance to shower the past couple days—he'd left without showering after training on Sunday, and he’d been in a hurry to leave after school that day.

It was nice to get clean. He used a tiny amount from one of the shampoo bottles—it smelt fruity. Izuku can’t help but wonder if it’s Sensei’s, or the man’s husband’s. He feels bad using their soap, but a shower is pretty pointless without actually cleaning.

Still, he makes quick work of the shower so he can get out fast.

He dries off after shutting the water off, then dresses quickly. It’s weird to be undressed in his teacher’s home. It’s weird to be in his teacher’s home period. At least he technically has a friend here, because Oboro follows Sensei around like a puppy.

Izuku shoves his uniform and sweatshirt into his backpack, hoping the uniform doesn’t get too wrinkled before school tomorrow. School tomorrow was gonna be weird. He’d been *in* his teacher’s apartment.

He unlocks the bathroom door after making sure everything he’d touched was back in place, even the wet towel folded neatly on the counter. He would’ve hung it up, but he wasn’t sure where too, since the towel rack was already full.

He feels awkward.

His steps are quiet as he pads through his teacher’s apartment, bare feet announcing his arrival. His teacher and his husband are both at the counter, backs turned to him. He shuffles his feet anxiously, forcing a half smile when Oboro, perched on the counter beside the men, gives him a wide grin and a sheepish wave.

It’s Sensei’s husband who notices him first, “oh!” the man chirps as he swirls around to grin at Midoriya, and, wait a second— “how was your shower, Lil’ Listener? No trouble with the faucet?”

“Present Mic?” Izuku gapes, shooting a betrayed look to the laughing

ghost.

“Well, that didn’t take long,” Aizawa-Sensei huffs monotonously.

“You didn’t tell him upfront?” Mic-Sensei shoots Aizawa-Sensei a scandalized look, before he sent Izuku an apologetic glance.

“Where’s the fun in telling him upfront? He’s smart, he would’ve figured it out eventually. All it took was you opening your mouth, ‘zashi.”

“Shota, that’s awful!” Mic shakes his head, “sorry, Midoriya. I guess this is a bit of a surprise, huh? I thought Aizawa would’ve briefed ya a bit before bringing you home, so you weren’t thrown in head first. Guess I was wrong.”

Present Mic’s tone towards the end is accusing, but Sensei just shrugs his shoulders indifferently, looking back down at whatever he was making.

Izuku can just slowly nod his head, not trusting his voice in the slightest.

He lets his gaze flicker to Oboro; eyes narrowed in silent censure. That innocent question in passing of if his two Sensei’s were close flashing in his mind, and conveyed easily to the ghost who flashes a grin.

“Hey, I told you they were *close*,” the ghost laughs, hands raising in surrender, “I just didn’t specify *how* close. To be fair, it really wasn’t my place to share, but now you know! Your teachers are married, weird, huh?”

He could hit the ghost right now, and probably not even feel sorry about it.

“Midoriya?” Present Mic’s voice is soft and concerned, “you alright? Not gonna dissociate on us, are ya? I know this is a lot to take in so suddenly…”

“Oh, uh, no. I won’t, I mean, I’m not, uh dissociating? Sorry,” Izuku forces his attention back, smiling sheepishly when he catches both his teacher’s gazes on him, “just… just surprised. I mean, I uhm, w-we didn’t think Sensei well… that he, uhm, he’s never seemed *f-fond* of, um, you? I guess?”

“I’m not,” Aizawa-Sensei snorts in agreement, which in turn prompts

an offended scoff from Present Mic.

“You are so!” Mic sputters, spinning to point an accusatory finger at Aizawa-Sensei, who stares back blankly, entirely unoffended, “we're *married*! You are fond of me, and I know it! Don’t lie to Midoriya, you grump! You definitely like me!”

Aizawa levels the man a glance, eyes flicking down to the finger almost pressed against his chest before batting it away and looking towards his student. “We made onigiri. I hope you’re hungry, Kid. Have a seat.”

Present Mic lets out a huff, shaking his head as he does so. He joins Aizawa-Sensei at the counter again, but doesn’t linger long, just grabs the tray of onigiri, while Aizawa-Sensei collects plates from a cupboard.

While they’re distracted, Midoriya does as told, inching into the kitchen before settling himself at the table. There are four chairs tucked in around it, so he pulls the one closest to the door out, sitting stiffly as he sets his backpack on the floor, tucked under him slightly.

“Coffee, Midoriya?” Sensei asks after setting the plates down on the table. He turns back to the counter, already working on preparing a fresh pot of coffee.

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but Present Mic beats him too it, sitting on the chair to Izuku’s left. “You are not giving our student coffee at three AM. Some of us still need to sleep!” Then, to Izuku, the man continues, “we have tea, or juice. Uhm, water? Anything suit your fancy, Listener?”

“Tea?” Izuku shrugs, fiddling with his own fingers. He doesn’t drink much coffee, he’d always been afraid of it stunting his growth like his mother had always told him, and he’s already short enough. He won’t lie and say he hadn’t been living on the beverage over the past week and a bit of working at the café, but he doesn’t quite like the taste either.

“Fine,” Sensei nods. “’zashi?”

“Tea,” the blonde-haired man decides after a second. “I’m still hoping to sleep a bit before work tomorrow. I don’t know how you can drown yourself in coffee and still be able to sleep.”

Aizawa-Sensei doesn’t respond to that, but he does move to fill the

kettle.

Aizawa-Sensei leans the small of his back against the counter, scanning Izuku where he's sitting. The teen tries not to wriggle nervously at the attention, ducking his head and toeing at his backpack on the floor, where it's leaned against the table leg.

He's not afraid—he does trust his Sensei.

And he has a deep respect for Present Mic as well. He likes him, but he can't say he trusts him like he trusts Aizawa-Sensei. But still, he knows he's safe, he's just... anxious. He doesn't want to burden them with his shitshow of a life, but it doesn't look like he's really got any options here? Especially with a persistent ghost hellbent that he reaches out.

Something brushes against Izuku's leg, and he jolts both out of his thoughts, and up into a ramrod straight position. He may make a noise of surprise or something, because Present Mic jumps in surprise too, and even Sensei's gaze jerks up, locking on the teen who's ducking under the table.

"That's Satan," Oboro calls from the counter, cocking his head at the cat. The cat seems to stare right back at the ghost. "He's mostly harmless despite the name."

"Oh!" Yamada-Sensei laughs, head ducking down too to look at the cat, "don't worry, Listener, that's just Blanket."

"Blanket?" Izuku frowns, glancing first at the black and white tuxedo cat, before narrowing his eyes at Oboro.

"Yep!" The blonde-haired man nods, "Shota found him on patrol a couple years ago, when he was just a tiny little thing. He's appropriately named; check any blankets before you sit down—it's a good thing cats have nine lives because he's definitely lost a few by being sat on. He's the sweetest though!"

"He's the devil," Aizawa-Sensei scoffs from the counter. Oboro gestures to Aizawa-Sensei in a 'that's what I said!' kinda way. Despite his words, the dark-haired man taps on his chest once and the cat rushes over, perching at his feet before jumping gracefully into his arms. "He responds to both Blanket, as well as the nickname Satan, which he's called by depending on how much of a little shit he's being. Don't be fooled by cute faces, Midoriya. They're menaces."

“They’re?” the teen’s eyes widen in surprise. It’s hard to take the man’s words seriously, as he cradles a cat to his chest. He’d never imagined his stern; stony-faced teacher could look so domestic. But here he is with a husband (*Present Mic!*), cuddling a cat to his person.

This night probably couldn’t get any weirder.

“You really didn’t tell him anything, did you?” Mic-Sensei tuts, shooting Aizawa-Sensei a light glare. “We have three cats, Listener. You’ll probably see Fish and Nemo too at some point. Fish is pretty old; I’ve had him since I was around your age, and Nemo doesn’t like anyone other than Sho, so she’s probably hiding somewhere. And there’s a bunch of strays in the neighborhood that we feed too, but none of them trust us yet.”

“I’m making progress with the strays.”

Wait a second… was Aizawa-Sensei *pouting*…?

“Sure,” Present Mic shrugs, angling his head towards Aizawa-Sensei with a fond look, “but we’re already one cat over the pet limit in the lease we signed.”

“Like our landlord would notice.”

“Well, she would if we had an army of cats following you around like their cat God, or something!”

Izuku just looks between the two of them as they talk, almost like they’d forgotten he was there. Banter. His two teachers, *Aizawa-Sensei* and Present Mic were bantering. He blinks, glancing towards where Oboro is doing the same thing, but almost as if the ghost can sense his gaze, he looks towards him.

“They’re always like this,” the ghost lifts one shoulder into a shrug. “You’ll get used to it. I’ve been telling you for ages Sho’s a softie, I mean, look at him holding that absolute demon of a cat. Adorable.”

The kettle whistles as Izuku looks back towards his teacher. The man leans down slightly, but the cat almost *slinks* out of his arms, landing on the floor with a thump. The cat saunters out of the room, and Izuku can’t help but watch him go. He wishes he had that kind of confidence.

Movement out of the corner of his eye draws his attention back to the table, where he sees his Sensei setting a mug of steeping tea in front of

them, before returning to the counter and pouring himself a mug of fresh coffee. He chugs it—and jeez, that's *steaming* hot; *how?*—before pouring a second that he sips as he joins them at the table.

Present Mic had already set to work placing a plate in front of each of them, giving Izuku a small, comforting smile as he does so. He's so far out of his depth, he doesn't move until after his teachers have.

Aizawa-Sensei is the first to grab one of the rice balls, and Present Mic takes the next, clearly following his lead. Izuku hesitates, glancing between the two of them—Mic-Sensei is already taking a bite out of his, but Aizawa-Sensei is watching him lazily, silently urging him to do the same with his eyes.

Izuku decides to bite the bullet and grab one of the onigiri from the plate in the center of the table, staring down at it before taking a tiny bite of it.

It tastes good—and he's not sure if it actually tastes amazing (he's sure it does), or if he's just so hungry that eating a shoe would probably have the same effect. After the first, he takes a bigger bite, suddenly aware of the hungry clench his stomach had been in.

He had been eating—convenience store foods, LunchRush's school meals; but he's painfully aware right now that his appetite hadn't been nagging him recently. He doesn't remember the last thing he actually ate—even though he had bought a lunch from the cafeteria that day. He'd slept through lunch.

He takes another bite, savoring the filling of the rice ball. It's a quick tuna filling—the same you'd get from a convenience store, but it's so much better. *Homemade*. It's been a while since he'd had homemade. It always tastes better.

He savors the flavors as the painful hungry feeling fades away to a calm contentment.

His onigiri is gone before he realizes. His teachers are still eating theirs, and he's reminded then of where he is. He feels nervous again, unsure if he should reach for another, or not.

"Just take another one," Oboro prompts from where he hadn't moved from the counter. Izuku's eyes flick towards him, but he doesn't move his head at all. Oboro looks content where he's curled into a ball, his back pressed against the fridge, knees drawn up to his chest. It's a small, probably unused corner of countertop between the fridge and a

wall. That's probably been his spot for a long time. "They won't care," the ghost adds, "trust me."

He does trust the ghost, but he's still nervous. How could he not be? This was uncharted territory. He was in his teacher's—no, *two* of his teacher's— home.

"Eat, Problem Child." Izuku jolts his gaze to where Sensei is finally reaching for another. Present Mic's is gone now too, but he's instead focused on his tea. "I know you're hungry, so eat. If you don't eat them, they'll go to waste."

"Well," Present Mic clears his throat, "they'll go in the fridge for later, but yeah, eat as many as you'd like, Lil' Listener. Help yourself!"

Oboro hums from where he's sitting, and Izuku knows if he were to glance over, the ghost would have a shit-eating grin on his face. With a slow, anxiously shaking hand, he reaches for another. He takes a bite just so he won't be expected to talk.

"Like them, Listener?" Present Mic asks over the rim of his mug. His eyes are bright despite the hour of the morning, tone a pleasant calm that's almost like his teaching voice, but also completely not.

Izuku nods hurriedly, mouth full of rice, dried seaweed and tuna. He swallows the bite, looking towards him, "they're delicious," he promises, glancing between the two teachers, "thank you."

Sensei waves him off, as he takes another bite, and Present Mic smiles warmly.

Not a lot is said after that—his teachers seem content to just let him eat for now. He finishes off the second onigiri before grabbing a third, shooting a look between his teachers, but neither are paying attention to him.

He takes a bite, glancing at Oboro.

The ghost, unlike his teachers, is watching him. But Izuku's pretty used to that.

He looks back at his food before he's caught staring at a random corner of his teacher's kitchen.

He finishes off the third, knows he could eat a fourth, but reaches for his tea instead. Four seems rude. Mic-Sensei had told him to help

himself, but four onigiri? Too much. He doesn't want to take advantage of their kindness, and eat all their food. So, instead, he sips at the now lukewarm tea. It's sweet, almost perfectly so.

It's calm in the kitchen; still, he can't help but think about how it's a little weird being with his teachers outside of school, but it's less so now that he's warm, and fed. It's the most content he's felt in ages. He feels safe, even if he doesn't trust this completely.

"Done, Kid?" Aizawa-Sensei asks casually when Izuku makes no move to grab another onigiri, head lulling to the side. He's clutching at the handle of his mug, looking about ready to get a third cup. Izuku nods slowly, looking down at the couple stray grains of rice on his plate that had fallen off his onigiri at some point. "Good, we'll talk now then."

Oof. Maybe he's not as content as he thought. The admission has a strike of fear climbing along his spine. He'd almost forgotten about that part. He should've known Sensei wasn't going to let this go—he had found him asleep on the ground.

He must look nervous, because his Sensei regards him carefully, and Present Mic frowns thoughtfully. The blonde-haired teacher grabs the plate of remaining onigiri before collecting all three of their plates too. He makes himself busy at the counter.

"Would you prefer to just talk to me?" Aizawa-Sensei suggests quietly, soft and inviting. He'd heard the tone before, but it was a rarity. Izuku shakes his head. He doesn't mind Present Mic knowing, and he's very aware that Oboro wouldn't leave unless he straight up told him too. "Mic doesn't mind leaving, Midoriya. If that'll make you more comfortable."

"No... no," the teen shakes his head again, "I don't mind just... I don't know where to start?"

He's hardly aware that he's fidgeting with his mug, tracing the lines of the black cat on the side of it. He wants to be surprised by the cat mug, but after seeing his teacher with that cat from earlier, he'd be more surprised if he was holding a blank mug.

"I could ask questions?" Aizawa-Sensei suggests as Present Mic grabs his mug to refill. The man shoots his husband a fleeting grateful glance before returning his attention to Izuku. "You don't have to answer them, obviously, I can't and won't force you too, I just... I want to understand, Problem Child."

The teen gives a tiny, slow nod. That sounds reasonable. At least this way he doesn't have to retell everything. Sensei will give him a starting base, and he'll just... fill in the blanks.

The teen wonders where his teacher will start?

"Well," the man's steady gaze is on Izuku, "first I'd like to know if you know where your mother is?"

The surprise must show on his face, because his teacher regards him carefully. He'd not been expecting that. That's... that's oddly specific to the current problem, but how would Sensei guess that so fast? The man's lips curl downwards thoughtfully, "I'm going to take that as a no."

"W-why," Izuku stops, clears his throat in a vain attempt to get his voice to stop being a nervous whisper, "why are you wondering about my mother?"

"We've been trying to get ahold of her," Aizawa-Sensei explains easily before his head cocks towards Izuku in disbelief, "Midoriya..." his voice comes out breathy, "you can't honestly think we wouldn't be trying to figure out why you've been so different in class? We've been worried about you, you've been more tired, less focused. Your grades have started to slip. We've been trying to arrange a wellness check with you and your mother for over a week."

"You... you have?"

"We have," the man assures stiffly. "Mic and I stopped by your apartment on Saturday since none of our calls were returned, but no one was home. I was going to ask you to have your mother get in contact with me after your training on Sunday, but it slipped my mind since we ended early, and I'd planned to keep you after class today—or, yesterday now, I suppose, but you—well..."

Izuku's silently thankful his teacher trails off instead of remind him of how he'd run from the gym without a word. Not his proudest moment.

Present Mic returns, a pot of tea in one hand, and Aizawa-Sensei's mug of coffee in the other. He sets the mug in front of the man, before silently offering Izuku more tea. He accepts just so he'll have something to keep himself distracted with.

Izuku's still curious how much Aizawa-Sensei had heard, but he's not curious enough to bring light to it and ask. If he did that, he might

have to actually talk about it, and he doesn't have an excuse for why he was yelling at someone who wasn't really there.

"So you... haven't seen your mother, Listener?" Present Mic asks softly, head angled in Izuku's direction.

"Oh, uhm, n-no? She just... she works a lot, and we, um, had opposite schedules so she was... she wasn't usually around... I didn't usually *see* her, but I... I *knew* she was there, y'know?"

"When was the last time you saw her?" Aizawa-Sensei cocks an eyebrow at him.

Izuku drops his gaze to the mug in his hands as he swallows, his fingers fiddle with the ceramic, running along the handle, "she, uhm, she signed my Yuuei admission forms for me but... but I hadn't really seen her."

He hears Present Mic suck in a breath, and he can feel Aizawa-Sensei stiffen even with the space between them. He knows this looks bad. He knows. He's known it wasn't normal, or right, but that's just how it was.

"Midoriya..." Aizawa-Sensei says slowly, unsettled, "that was almost a month ago."

"I... I know, Sensei." Izuku feels stupid admitting it. Admitting that they were so dysfunctional. He hadn't seen his mother in a *month*, she'd moved out without him realizing, and he'd just thought it was normal. He hadn't realized she'd left because she was never around to begin with—because it wasn't a concern when he didn't see her for a few days, or a week, or, hell, even a few *weeks*.

There's a silence that settles in around them. He wouldn't exactly call it suffocating, but it wasn't comforting either. It was almost tense, but in that disbelieving kind of way. They were shocked—he could see it in the way neither knew what to say next. By their faces and tense shoulders.

"How have you been..."

"She took care of me," Izuku admitted without looking up, finger smoothing along the rim of his mug as something to do. "She gave me allowance money for food, and kept the apartment rent paid so I had a roof over my head. I... I never went without. I had clothes, and *stuff*, and... and everything I needed. Sometimes she'd come home, but...

but I never really saw her."

"Izuku," Sensei's voice is soft, and Izuku forces his gaze up, because Aizawa-Sensei has never sounded like that, nor has he ever used any of their first names, "you were sleeping on the street behind a dumpster. That isn't taken care of."

Present Mic lets out a noise somewhere between a gasp and a choke, but Aizawa-Sensei doesn't draw his attention away from Izuku. The teen might've laughed at the fact Aizawa-Sensei clearly hadn't explained anything to his husband if he weren't so close to crying.

"Izuku..." Oboro's voice sounds raw off to the side, and that's when the teen realized he wasn't *close* to crying, he *was* crying.

He wipes at his eyes, clearing his throat. "A week and a half ago," he blows out a stuttered breath, "our landlord came to the door to talk with my mom. She, uhm, she wasn't there but... I thought she was just, y'know, at work, or busy... like she usually was."

He sees his teachers exchange a look out of the corner of his eye, but he's busy trying not to start sobbing at the table, "he told me she hadn't paid rent the week prior when it was due, so he, he asked me to pass on a message to her."

Izuku's quiet for a second as he tries to figure out how to carry on. How do you tell your teachers your mother left? Just packed up without you knowing and took off to God knows where?

"I-" the boy shakes his head when his voice comes out in a whisper, continuing when he's sure he'll have volume again, "I went to her room because I thought, y'know, it's been a while since I've seen her? She..." he sucks in a breath, squeezing his eyes shut, "h-her stuff was all gone. She was *gone*."

"Gone?" Present Mic breathed out like he was missing something, maybe even hoping he was missing something, but he had it all right.

"Did she..." Aizawa-Sensei starts before pausing, clearly thinking his words through completely, "did she leave anything for you? An explanation for her absence? Or... have you not heard anything from her at all?"

Izuku give a slow nod, fingers tightening around the mug. He releases his grip; silently afraid he'll accidentally activate One for All and smash his Sensei's mug. He reaches down to his backpack, unzipping

it before pulling out his Hero Analysis notebook—the one that held his mother's parting note pressed between the pages.

His fingers tapped on the book's cover, silently trying to decide whether he really wanted to show them. He'd already come this far, might as well. He flipped the cover open, thumb tracing the edge of the note before he picked it up and handed it to his homeroom teacher without a word.

For a second, Aizawa-Sensei just holds the note exactly where Izuku had given it to him. His hand hovers over the table, the little sheet of folded paper pressed between his fingertips. The man glares down at it, holding it in front of him like the note will spring to life and bite him.

Izuku's sure he'd stared at it the exact same way at some point, but now looking at it just makes him feel numb.

Izuku holds in a bated breath until finally, his teacher lifts his other hand to unfold it. The man's breath hitches as his shoulders square up. He glares down at it like he's reading those two words on repeat. Over and over again.

Finally, he sets it on the table like he can't bear to look at it any longer and slides it towards the other teacher without a word. He'd spared Izuku a glance, almost as if asking for permission to share it, but Izuku had refused to meet his eyes, merely lifting one of his shoulders in a pathetic shrug.

Present Mic's face holds a lot more emotion that Aizawa-Sensei's when he reads it, sad eyes bouncing between the two words before he's looking at Izuku with a soft, sympathetic look. "Oh, Kiddo..."

The teen gives another shrug. He brings his hands back up to the mug. The tea has gone pretty cold now, but he still takes a tentative sip. His cheeks feel kinda wet, so he rubs his cheek against his shoulder in an attempt to dry them up.

"Izuku," Aizawa-Sensei's voice is calm and cautious as he addresses the teen, "how long have you been sleeping on the street?"

He doesn't really want to answer. But he can't just not answer—not when his two teachers are giving him such soft, understanding looks. He wants to believe they understand this—understand him. He just... he doesn't want to do this alone anymore.

“T-technically three nights. I... I got the eviction notice three days ago, but I... I was *scared* to sleep on the street s-so I... I uhm, I slept in the twenty-four-hour laundromat in my neighborhood. They, um, they caught on and I wasn’t allowed to sleep there again so...” the teen stares down into his tea, “j-just two nights on the street.”

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut and only opens them when he feels a hand on his forearm. The touch is oddly comforting. Present Mic had always been the teacher that would pat their heads, or shoulders when they’d done well in class, or set cautious touches on their shoulders or arms when they needed comfort. He did it to everyone in class 1-A, and Izuku was sure it didn’t stop with them.

“I’m sorry you went through that, Izuku,” Present Mic tells him, and for some reason, Izuku actually believes him. Some people say it just because it’s the right thing to say, but Izuku’s sure that’s not the case here.

“Why didn’t you tell me, Izuku?”

Izuku looks up at his homeroom teacher. The man is frowning, but it’s different than the usual frown. It’s almost deeper—holding emotions that Izuku can’t really place, but it makes him feel guilty. Like Aizawa-Sensei honestly cares about his wellbeing—and maybe he does? Izuku doesn’t know. He’s never had people, *teachers*, like Aizawa-Sensei and Mic-Sensei who cared.

So, he shrugs.

“I... I could’ve helped you, Kid. I *would’ve* helped you.”

“I didn’t want to be a burden,” the teen whispers. He feels Present Mic’s hand squeeze his forearm in an attempt at comfort, or reassurance, but it doesn’t really work. “You’re already so busy, and you were kind enough to take extra time to help me with On— with m-my Quirk. I just... I didn’t want to bother anyone. I thought I could do it all myself.”

“You’re not a bother, Problem Child.”

Izuku feels a light smile slip onto his face, speaking without really looking up, “you can’t really tell me I’m not a bother and then call me ‘Problem Child’ Sensei. It kinda contradicts itself.”

Present Mic lets out a snort of laughter, but Aizawa-Sensei just scans the teenager before his lips quirk up the faintest amount, “I suppose I

can't argue with that logic. You *are* a problem child, but you're in no way a *bother*. I expect you kids to cause problems; you're all learning. But even with all those problems, and I'm expecting a lot with your classmates, none of you are burdens, or bothers."

There's a pause, but it's no longer than a second before Sensei continues, voice sharp with resolve, but still quiet and attentive, "it's okay to need help sometimes, Kid."

He sees Present Mic nodding in agreement out of the corner of his eye. He notices the blonde-haired man's hand is gone, he's not sure when he'd pulled back. His arms are now crossed on the table in front of him, almost holding himself up.

Izuku frowns down at his tea, thumbing the side of the mug. "I... I need help, Sensei."

Saying it both knocks the wind out of him, and lifts a weight off his shoulders. The mix of hopefulness and dread swirl in his stomach almost unpleasantly. He's not sure which he should be feeling after admitting he needed help—ultimately asking his teachers for help. He's not sure there even is a right way to be feeling.

"I've got you, Midoriya," Aizawa-Sensei replies, and Izuku feels his teacher's foot nudge against his under the table. That action, for some insane reason, has Izuku's shoulders easing up a little from the strain of anxiety he'd had tensing in his muscle for as long as he could remember. "You're not in this alone anymore."

"We're right there with you, Listener," Present Mic adds with a wide, toothy grin. The blonde pats Izuku's hand comfortingly, smile softening to something a little more personal.

"Definitely right there with you." Oboro's voice joins in, his own voice just as hushed. Izuku wants to look over at him, but knows better than too, especially with his observant Sensei already watching him. "One-hundred percent, 'zuku. You're stuck with me."

He can't *not* smile at that though.

Izuku takes a sip of his tea, looking between his teachers thoughtfully. "What happens now?"

"You go to sleep," Aizawa-Sensei huffs, standing from his chair. His back cracks as he stretches lightly. "I highly doubt you've been getting much sleep on the streets. So, you'll go to sleep here, in the guest

room. In an actual *bed*."

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but instead lets out a quiet yawn. He really is tired. He hadn't realized how tired he actually was. He wipes at his eyes with the balls of his palms, stifling a second yawn as he does so.

"You must be beat, Lil' Listener," Present Mic coos, but it's not condescending at all—it's gentle and comforting in a distantly familiar way. The blonde-haired man stands slowly, leaving his mug on the table as he pushes his chair in under the table, "c'mon, I'll show you to the guest room. Grab your bag, Kiddo."

Izuku does as told, too tired to put up much of a fight. Now that his teacher had mentioned a bed, it's all he can really think about. He's so tired. Exhausted. He just wants to sleep, and now he can.

He wavers when he finally pushes himself to his feet. Aizawa-Sensei steadies him with a hand on his upper arm, only pulling away when the wobbling has stopped. There's an almost humorous tilt to his teacher's lips.

"Have a good rest, Problem Child," the man teases, but Izuku can hear the sincerity in it. And then the man's hand is on top of his head, fingers ruffling through his still slightly damp curls, and Izuku just *knows* he leans into the touch in his exhaustion.

Oboro is giggling, and Izuku's sure he hears Sensei let out a soft puff of laughter as well. Still, he can't find it in himself to be upset. He just feels so soft and warm. So not alone. He likes it.

"C'mon, Kiddo," Present Mic calls again, this time from the doorway, "let's get you to a bed before you fall over."

At last, tucked away in a bed. Wrapped under warm, soft blankets and with his head buried in a pillow, Izuku feels at ease. He hardly even cares he's in his teacher's guest bedroom, in his teacher's apartment—all he cares about is *sleep*.

Chapter End Notes

> We've arrived at the smother Midoriya Izuku in love, affection and caring parents segment of this fic! I love writing Dadzawa and Dadmic, because they're perfect. Protect that lil' greenbean boys. Oboro is best boy, I love him.

So! Big thanks to everyone who suggested a cat for this chapter! I went back and forth on cats for literally days, reading what you guys gave me in the comments and trying to piece them into the fic. I ended up settling on *Kitti*'s cat Nemo, and *BlueChipsy*'s cat Fish! They weren't in this chapter, but I've already written the first part of the next chapter and they'll be making their debut then! Also fun stuff of my own cat coming because he's got... *interesting* quirks. If you two would like to add anything else about your cats that I can fit in somewhere feel free!

Sorry to anyone who's cat wasn't picked :(I'm not kidding when I say the decision was super hard to make! I loved reading about them all! I just needed to find some personalities that weren't too similar, but also fit together! Thanks to everyone who commented!

As always, comments greatly appreciated! I love reading your guys' thoughts and opinions on the chapters! I hope you guys liked this one too! Thanks for reading! :D

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hello!

Welcome back to another update! I'd just like to thank you all once again for all the activity this fic has been getting! It makes me so happy that you guys are liking it as much as I am! Now, not much more to say up here, but check out the notes at the end if you'd like!

Without further ado, enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku wakes up gradually. He drags an arm over his eyes—there's no sunlight assaulting him from above, but they still ache for some reason—as does his brain.

His mind is hazy; lagging behind. He feels warm and comfortable and... and he's not on the street. The street is not this warm, comfortable and pleasantly dark.

Izuku jerks up into a sitting position, sucking in a breath as he does so. Where is he? His eyes dart around the room, taking everything in too fast to really take anything in. He sees, but it's almost unseeing in a way.

"Aye, calm down, 'zuku..." *Oboro*. Good, Oboro was here. That's *good*. The teen's attention snaps to the side of the room where the ghost sits. "You were pretty outta it when you fell asleep last night. You were out before your head even hit the pillow. You're okay, okay? You're in Shota and Hizashi—er... Aizawa and Yamada's apartment, 'member?"

Yeah... yeah. He does remember that. He remembers being startled awake behind the dumpster, only to come face to face with his homeroom teacher. He remembers the concern on his teacher's face, and he remembers walking to his teacher's apartment with him. He remembers Aizawa-Sensei's husband—*Present Mic*—Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic are *married*.

He remembers showering, and eating delicious onigiri.

And the *talk*.

God, they'd talked, hadn't they?

He'd told them about his mom and then... and then he'd fallen asleep, right?

"What time is it?" Izuku manages to croak out, throwing the blankets off himself only to freeze when something beside him makes an unhappy noise. He turns slowly, gaze locking with a cat. Definitely not the cat from last night. He faintly remembers Present Mic talking about two additional cats, so this must be one of them.

"Just after noon," Oboro answers. There's a desk in the room, it's not overly big, but it's a good size for Oboro to perch on, reclined back against the wall. The heel of his foot is hooked over the backrest of the chair pushed under the desk; one ankle crossed over the other. His gaze his fond, nose wrinkled with a grin, "and that's Nemo. I'm honestly surprised she's even here with you. She never comes in here, because she doesn't like me any more than she like 'zashi. You must have the cat whispering gift like Shota does."

Izuku's brain stalls for a second. The cat is still curled up like a loaf of bread, paws tucked under her, but he can almost see the glare on her little face. Her eyes a boring into Oboro like he's a disgrace not to be trusted, but her attention drags towards him after a second. The annoyed look doesn't change. Does she like him or not? He's not sure.

"It's after noon?" Izuku's brain kickstarts on that, and he jolts up from the bed. The cat makes another annoyed noise, but doesn't scramble away at his quick movements. "I'm late for school! W-why didn't my *teachers* wake me—why didn't *you* wake me??"

"Why would I do that?" Oboro cocks his head, "you needed the sleep. Besides, I'm sure nothing short of an earthquake would've stirred you. You crashed hard, Izu. Sho and 'zashi keep peeking in to check on you, and you barely even moved."

Izuku feels his cheeks heat up at the knowledge. His teachers were checking in on him? "Really?"

"Uh huh," the ghost gives a nod, "how else do you think Nemo got in here? Snuck in when Sho cracked it open to see if you were up. I doubt she meant to get closed in, but if she was unhappy, she'd be screaming to get out, and no doubt he'd come to her rescue because he's weak for that little brat."

Izuku looks back at the bed as his heartrate from the surprise

awakening finally starts to slow.

The cat had moved over and was happily sprawled in the spot Izuku had just vacated. She's a very pretty cat; orange and white. She looks like she has soft fur, but he's not going to pet her right now because he doesn't want to disturb her. She seems to be content in his spot, probably reveling in the warmth from his body heat.

Izuku decides to leave his school bag on the floor, wrapping his arms around himself as he pushes the door open. The cat doesn't move—appears to be asleep again. He steps out, leaving it ajar in case she wants to leave at some point.

He pads his way into the kitchen, keeping quiet yet also announcing himself. Oboro is at his side, silent but there. He likes having the ghost hanging around, he doesn't feel as nervous as he's sure he would if Oboro weren't around.

Izuku freezes in the doorway of the kitchen, taking the scene in before he's noticed. Present Mic is stood at the fridge, reaching around inside it, and perched above him is a cat laying along the entire edge of the fridge. The cat's tail swishes faintly, yellow eyes boring down on the blonde hero.

The cat has grey fur and looks aged—due to that, and process of elimination since he'd already met the other two cats, this one must be Fish. Izuku watches as Present Mic pulls away from the fridge, shutting it easily before reaching up and offering something—is... is that *cheese?*— to the cat.

Without hesitation, the cat takes the offering sinking his teeth into it as he scans the hero almost affectionately.

"You're a sucker for that cat," Aizawa-Sensei huffs from where he's sitting at the table. He hadn't even looked up from whatever he was working on. He's sat in the chair Izuku had been last night, so his back is too him.

"He's fifteen, he deserves some cheese in his life, Sho." Present Mic scoffs without looking in their direction. "And like you're any better with Nemo. Cats don't need fresh fish and gravy as treats. She's a bit of a spoiled brat. Fish likes cheese, but he doesn't refuse dry cat treats like Nemo does."

"Nemo is perfect. How can you say no to her little face?"

“Nemo is *not* perfect. She scratches Nemuri every time she sees her. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a cat that hates literally *everyone*, besides you for whatever reason—I mean, I’ve known her since she was a baby too and she barely tolerates me.”

“She’s my spirit animal,” Sensei’s voice comes out monotone, but there’s definitely a curl of humor, “and I’d scratch Nemuri too if it was socially acceptable to do so. It’s her fault for trying to pet her when she *knows* Nemo doesn’t like her.”

Izuku’s not sure how to interrupt the conversation. He rolls on the balls of his heels anxiously, which seems to prompt Oboro on. The ghost saunters over to Present Mic, who’s turned to the counter now, and steps through him.

“Y-yow!” the man gasps as he takes a few steps away from the counter, “I swear, these cold spots are following—Oh! Midoriya!”

Aizawa-Sensei turns in his seat to look behind him, but Present Mic speaks again before the homeroom teacher has a chance.

“Good morning, Listener!” Present Mic greets happily, grinning widely.

He’s not wearing his hero costume again, just regular civilian clothes like he had been the night before, but he looks a bit more put together. Half of his hair is tucked up in a neat bun, while the other half is still down. He’s also wearing a pair of regular glasses. He doesn’t really look anything like Present Mic right now.

Aizawa-Sensei snorts from the table, turning back towards the paperwork, “it’s after noon, ‘zashi. Good afternoon, Midoriya.”

The dark-haired man’s got papers stacked around him, and Izuku can just make out that they’re assignments they’d recently gotten. That was just after he’d started losing sleep due to overworking and stress so he’s afraid to see what his grade will look like.

His homeroom teacher is also not wearing his hero costume. He’s got a long-sleeved black shirt on, and a pair of matching black pants. Unlike Present Mic, Aizawa-Sensei looks almost exactly like he does in his hero costume. He’s just missing the capture weapon, and it’s different seeing his teacher with his hair up in a messy bun.

“You’re such a stickler,” the blonde man huffs affectionately before looking back to the teenager, “good *afternoon*, Listener. I hope you

slept well. You looked like you really needed some shut-eye, yo."

Izuku sees Aizawa-Sensei shaking his head with a light huff before he hears the man's voice, "how are you feeling, Midoriya?"

"Better," Izuku returns softly, bowing his head thankfully at Present Mic, who's still looking in his direction. "Thank you for your hospitality, Senseis."

"Don't worry about it, Kiddo," Present Mic waves him off, smiling kindly. "We're just glad you're safe, ya'dig?"

He bows his head in a nod, giving a light smile in return.

He's still unsure what he's supposed to be doing—he'd always been awkward in other people's homes, besides Kacchan's since he'd been going there since he was a baby. The Bakugou home had always been like a second home to him or... it had until things with he and Kacchan started getting messy.

"Make yourself at home, Midoriya. Help yourself to anything in the fridge," Present Mic calls from the counter, stirring a pot the smells deliciously like broth, "I'm just finishing up lunch. You like any sides with your soba, Listener? We usually like to have spring onions, wasabi and ginger?"

"That sounds good," he nods. He really doesn't mind; he's in no way a picky eater. He'll eat anything. Besides, it's not like he'll say *no* when they're being so kind and feeding him. He'll take whatever's given and eat it with a smile because that's the polite thing to do—or, that's what his mom had said to do when Auntie Mitsuki made things Izuku didn't particularly like.

Neither teacher is looking as him, so he slips further into the room intent to get a glass of water.

He faintly remembers where the glasses and mugs are, cautiously pulling the cupboard open. He has to stretch to reach them—since both his teachers are tall, and he's pretty short. He manages to grab a glass, pulling his hand back.

He jumps, struggling to keep his hold on the glass as he squeaks out. Something had just grabbed him. Something had grabbed his *butt*. He's frozen in place, but slowly his head turns and angles downwards. It's one of the cats. The one from last night. Blanket.

Distantly, Izuku hears laughter. Oboro's laughter. He's laughing hard, but all Izuku can do is stare down at the cat staring up at him with unblinking eyes.

The cat is still stretched along him, one paw on his thigh, and the other on his butt like he's thinking about climbing him like a tree.

"Oh, oops. Sorry, Midoriya, I should've warned you about him." Present Mic lets out a nervous laugh, leaning forwards to shoo the cat away. "He sorta... *grabs*."

"Gropes," Oboro corrects with a wheeze of laughter. He's back on that little corner of counter, but he's sitting with his legs crossed this time. "Satan gropes people. He likes to touch the butt. He's definitely a pervert."

"You'll get used to it," Sensei calls from the table, not even looking up from his marking.

"Or it'll scare the crap outta you ever time he does it," Present Mic counters with a shrug. The blonde man shakes his head, returning to the pot on the stovetop.

Izuku blinks, glancing at the black and white cat. He's sitting off to the side now, staring directly up at Oboro. The ghost is leaned forwards, making clicking noises and that 'pspsps' sound at him.

He drags his attention away from them, instead joining Present Mic at his side so he can get some water from the tap. He drinks half of it, before refilling it and slowly moving to sit at the table with his Sensei. The teacher's gaze lifts up for just a second before dropping back to his marking.

He doesn't know how to start a conversation, so he runs the pad of his finger along the glass instead, pausing occasionally to take small sips. It's not an awkward silence—well, it *is*, but just too him, he's sure.

"If you've got something to ask, Problem Child, you can ask it." He hadn't looked up from his work, but Izuku realizes with a start that he'd been staring at his teacher. After another second, the man finally glances up again, "yes?"

"I'm supposed to be in school," Izuku bites his lip, ducking his eyes from his homeroom teacher's.

"I'm *sure* your teacher won't mind you missing a day," Aizawa-Sensei

snorts, head cocking because he is Izuku's primary teacher. Everything that goes on with class 1-A is run through Aizawa-Sensei first. "You needed sleep, Problem Child. I made an executive decision that your wellbeing was more important than getting you up for school this morning. One day is fine, no one can fault you for taking a day to relax and recover. I'll help you catch up personally, though you're not missing much."

"But you guys are..." *supposed to be in school too*. They're the teachers—just because Izuku isn't there, that doesn't mean the rest of his class isn't.

"Something important came up. You're my first priority right now. You, and your wellbeing." Sensei shrugs. "I doubt anyone will miss us for one day anyways—besides, substitutes are a thing, Midoriya. Midnight is covering your homeroom and as much as it physically pains me to say, I trust her."

"And I have Snipe sitting in for your English class. He's awful at English, so it's essentially a study block for the rest of the class." Present Mic chimes from the counter. "Get your paperwork off the table, Sho, lunch is ready!"

With a huff, the dark-haired man stands, collecting piles of paperwork. Izuku, feeling a little useless, stands up to help, refusing to look down at what he's carrying. He doesn't want to see anyone's marks or work.

"Thanks, Problem Child," the man nods, patting Izuku on the head as the teen settles his own pile beside Aizawa-Sensei's on the coffee table in the living room. He wants to lean into the gesture again, but he's awake enough to not this time.

When they return to the kitchen, Present Mic already has three bowls of hot soba in broth settled in front of three of the chairs. Each bowl has a small side dish of wasabi, ginger and spring onions just as he'd mentioned earlier.

There's a second glass of water on the table now, as well as a steaming mug of coffee where Aizawa-Sensei had been sitting. Izuku sits down in front of the bowl next to his half-drank glass of water, and Aizawa-Sensei retakes his seat as well. Present Mic is the last to sit down.

The soba is just as good as the onigiri from last night.

He thoroughly enjoys it, getting lost in the meal instead of the company around him. His teachers don't seem to mind, each eating

their own soba too. They talk back and forth a bit, casual conversation about classwork and the other teachers, but Izuku doesn't focus on it—he can't help but let his thoughts wander as he eats.

He doesn't feel as awkward anymore. And it's strange because he thinks he *should* feel awkward about that. He's sitting, on a school day, *during* school hours, eating soba with two of his teachers in their apartment, when they too should be in school. He's enjoying the quiet company of his two teachers (and his ghost friend) while he eats.

That's... that's definitely weird. But it doesn't feel weird.

He feels safe, and comfortable. There's that teeny-tiny spark of anxiety in the back of his mind, but overall, he's content here. With Aizawa-Sense and Present Mic.

"What's got you mumbling, Problem Child?"

Izuku jerks up from his thoughts, the noodle he'd had entangled in his chopsticks slipping back into the bowl of broth with a tiny splash. Had he been mumbling? Both his teachers are looking curiously at him.

Aizawa-Sensei is staring, but Present Mic is just glancing over between bites of his soba.

"Oh, I was just... well, I was wondering what happens now, Sensei?"

He remembers asking that same question last night—to which his teacher had responded that Izuku needed sleep. And he'd been right. That was a good place to start. But now he was rested, and thinking straight, and he knew this wasn't something he could just brush under the rug.

His homeroom teacher leans back in his chair thoughtfully, hand reaching to his side.

For a second, Izuku was confused until he saw tiny cat ears poking up over the side of the table. Fish was still watching over the kitchen from the top of the fridge and Blanket was attempting to swat at Oboro's wiggling fingers, which just left Nemo, who must've come out of the room.

"I can't let you go back out onto the streets," his teacher admits finally. "Morally I can't allow that to happen, your safety is my utmost importance, but *realistically*, I'd never in a million years allow one of my students to live like that when I can help them. It's unsafe, and it

would be completely illogical for me to ignore this when it's clearly affected you greatly in both your personal life, and your studies. I refuse to let you live in those conditions, Midoriya. It's just not going to happen; I hope you know that."

Izuku gives a slow nod as he swirls a noodle in his bowl with his chopsticks. He'd had a suspicion that that was how this was going to go. It's not like he wants to live on the streets. It's scary, and hard, and he's terrified of it, but he hadn't seen any other feasible options.

"You've got a couple options," his teacher explains, chopsticks abandoned on top of his bowl so he can give Izuku his full attention. The cat at his side is still swatting without claws for attention, but Sensei's elbows are on the table, and his fingers are laced together and supporting his chin. "You're fifteen, so you get to make some choices here, and I'll stand by whatever you choose. In the eyes of the law, you're still a child, but I know for a fact that you're entirely capable. I know you *are* a child, but you are old enough to make some decisions regarding your life, and I'll make sure you get a say in your situation, understand?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku sees Present Mic nodding along in agreement. He's not eating anymore either, but he's still clutching at his chopstick, following the conversation without really adding anything.

"Yes, Sensei," Izuku gives a little nod, "I understand."

"Good," Sensei nods. "Since you no longer have a place to live, or a guardian as far as we can see, we'll need to get in touch with the police and social services. You're a minor, so unfortunately, we can't not do that. We can't just keep you; it's basically kidnapping even if you have nowhere else to stay. The police and social services will first look into your mother's absence before tracking down any family members who can take custody of you."

"I don't... my parents were both only children and... all my grandparents have passed away..." Izuku informs, not looking up. "I don't think there's anywhere else I could..."

"That's okay," Present Mic hums softly, "they'll check, but even if there is no one, you'll be taken care of, Izuku."

Aizawa gives a stiff nod, looking between his husband and the teenager before tilting his head in Izuku's direction and continuing, "if they don't find a relative willing to take you in, you'll be put into the

system. Normally, you'd have very little say in this, but I'm giving you the option of where you'd like to stay, and I'll try my damnedest to make sure it happens.

"As a hero in training, you're a special case. It's hard to find foster families willing to work with the school because it takes up a great deal of your time between the school work and training exercises. Foster parents find it harder bonding with hero class students, and they have a difficult time understanding the time, effort and willpower you students are putting in to achieve your dreams so... placements don't usually work out. Plus, there's the fact the Yuuei students have been targets of a villain attack quite recently, people are hesitant to let heroes in training into their home even more so now. Keep that in mind, Midoriya.

"There is the option of group homes too, but... I'm not sure that's best for you. I don't want to see you swept away as just another statistic. It's an option though, so I won't take it off the table completely."

Aizawa-Sensei shakes his head, before he's ducking it slightly so his chin digs into his laced fingers, "there's also the option of becoming a ward of Yuuei. It wouldn't be the first time the school has taken guardianship over a student. All your needs will be met, and there won't be any hassle with foster homes and such."

His teacher is quiet for a second, gaze flicking from Izuku to Present Mic. They share a moment of eye contact before Present Mic's hands start moving. He places his chopsticks down finally, hands moving quickly before him. Aizawa-Sensei's eyes track the movements.

Izuku tries to keep up too, but he doesn't know any, what he assumes is, sign language. He glances over at Oboro, who's also following the hand gestures with a light frown. His eyes are bright with recognition, understanding what's being said. He catches Izuku's eyes after a second and shakes his head with a light smile, "I'm not going to translate for you, Izu. Sorry."

A frown tugs at his lips, but he understands.

"The last option," Aizawa-Sensei continues with a light huff, "would be me taking you in as a foster child. Hizashi and I both have emergency fostering licenses, as most of the teachers at the school do, so that shouldn't be a problem. We'd still need to do it through all the legal channels— speaking with the police and child protective services — but with any luck I'd be able to have you back by tonight. I'm not

sure if that's something you'd be comfortable with, and remember, Problem Child, this choice is entirely yours. It just seems logical to offer."

"I..." Izuku swallows, clearing his throat. His eyes feel watery, but he urges himself not to cry, "you-you'd really let me stay here, Sensei?"

His teacher shifts a little, frown deepening before relaxing into something softer, "to be honest, Izuku, I'd prefer to have you here. The foster system is... it's shit. I don't trust it. I want you to be safe, and the only place I know you'll be safe considering the circumstances, is here. It's the most logical solution—Present Mic and I both know hero work. We know how difficult this is, and we know what you'll be going through."

It does make a lot of sense. He knows these two men. They're his teachers. He trusts them. He knows Aizawa-Sensei will keep him safe, and he knows Present Mic will do the same. Not only are they teachers, they're also two Pro Heroes. This is quite possibly the safest place for him to be.

Izuku must've been quiet for too long, because Aizawa-Sensei shifts slightly. He leans more intently back against his chair, and Nemo takes the opportunity to launch into his lap.

"She's not supposed to be at the table, Sho," Present Mic scoffs softly, but his eyes are still flickering to Izuku. Aizawa-Sensei locks eyes with the blonde-hero, before reaching a hand up to stroke from the cat's head to the base of her tail in an act of defiance. And Izuku *snorts*.

"Sorry," he shakes his head, unable to wipe the small smile from his lips. Both his teachers look towards him, and he fights the urge to curl in on himself under their watchful eyes. He clears his throat, glaring down at his soba before looking up with all the confidence he can muster, "I, uhm, I'd r-really like to stay here, Sensei. If-if that's, I mean, if I can... I trust you."

"Then that's where you'll stay," Aizawa-Sensei gives a nod. "I'm glad I have your trust, Kid. I know I wasn't the best teacher at the start of the year."

"You were a good teacher," Izuku promises, though by the snort his Sensei lets out, he may have winced a bit as he said it. "I mean, you were right, Sensei, a-about my Quirk but... but maybe a bit harsh? We were all terrified."

“Yeah,” Present Mic nods, “he has that effect on people in general. And that whole *immediate expulsion* spiel makes all the first years crap their pants.”

“It’s not a spiel if I follow through,” Aizawa-Sensei huffs in annoyance, stroking the top of Nemo’s head gently. “Just because I didn’t expel anyone *this* year, doesn’t mean I haven’t before and won’t again in the future. Midoriya showed promise even with that ridiculously overpowered Quirk he’d waltz into my classroom with. You’ve been working well with it, Kid.”

Izuku’s sure his cheeks have washed over with a light pink blush at the praise—it means a lot coming from Aizawa-Sensei. He only says it if he truly means it, that’s what Izuku had noticed in the few weeks he’s been learning under the Pro. "Thank you, Sensei.”

His Sensei ducks his head in a nod, finally ushering the cat off his lap. “Are you finished eating, Problem Child? I hate to rush you on something like this, but we really should start getting this all sorted out. I’ve got an... acquaintance at the precinct that’s been made aware of the situation and he’s waiting for us.”

Izuku feels his stomach freeze and for a second, he thinks maybe Oboro had settled beside him, but a half glance towards where Blanket is still entertained by watching Oboro’s foot swing back and forth where it’s hanging over the edge of the counter proves that theory wrong. It must be nerves.

“I... I-yeah, I uhm, I’m not... that hungry anymore,” he’s sure if he took another bite he might throw up as anxiety swirls in his stomach.

Present Mic regards him with a soft look, standing up and brushing his fingers through Izuku’s curls, “don’t be worried, Kiddo, Eraser’ll be with ya the whole time, ya’dig?”

“You won’t?” Izuku angles his head up, catching the surprise on his teacher’s face.

The blonde hero freezes where he’d been reaching for Izuku’s half-finished bowl of soba, other hand already holding the rim of his own bowl, “I mean, I can if you really want me too, Listener? I was going to hang back and get some chores done. Clear out some of the clutter in the guest room for you. I was also going to try and get in contact with your landlord and see if your belongings were still there.”

“Oh,” Izuku breathes out, a warm feeling heating up the nervous chill

in his stomach. “No, it’s okay, I just thought… Uhm. I assumed. It’s okay. And, uh, I doubt that… h-he already… No, my apartment has already been cleaned out.”

“Your landlord kept *your* stuff from your room, Izu,” Oboro tells him, finally looking up from the cat, “he’s got it in a closet in his apartment, I saw it. He really likes you; you know.”

“B-but,” Izuku lets out a nervous laugh, “maybe he, uhm, kept some of it? I’m n-not sure.”

“Well,” Present Mic clicks his tongue thoughtfully, “no harm in trying, I guess. Hopefully you’re right, I’d hate for you to have lost everything but your school bag.”

Izuku give a little nod.

“Why don’t you go get dressed?” Aizawa-Sensei suggests offhandedly as he stands, stacking all the side dish plates and bringing them and his own bowl to the counter. “This isn’t something that’ll get easier the longer you wait; it’s only logical to get it sorted out now. You got clean clothes to wear, Midoriya?”

“Y-yeah,” Izuku nods, “I do. I think.” Well, moderately clean. He stands to leave the room, making it just to the doorway when he pauses at Present Mic’s voice calling out to him.

“Would you like me to do a load of laundry for you while you’re out, Lil’ Listener?” Present Mic suggests without looking at him. He’s at the sink now rinsing out the bowls. “I was already planning to do a few loads of ours since it’s my turn and I never usually have the time.”

“Y-you…” Izuku swallows, “I can do it. I don’t… Y-you don’t have too.”

Now his teacher does turn to look at him, frowning in thought, “I don’t mind, Izuku. I’m already doing ours, what’s one more load anyways, right? If you’re uncomfortable with that though, one of us can show you how to use the washer later today.”

“I’m not uncomfortable,” Izuku shakes his head, because he’s *not*. He’s not uncomfortable, he’s just… confused. The teen shuffles his feet in the kitchen doorway, “I just… I’ve always… are you sure?”

No one had done his laundry but him since his mother had first taught him how to use their own washer and dryer. That had been just after

she'd started working more hours—he'd only been six, or seven. It had just been something he'd always had to do, so the thought of someone else offering to help threw him for a loop.

"Completely," the voice hero chirps, turning back to the sink, "wouldn't have offered if I wasn't! Just leave whatever you want washed on the bed, or toss it in the basket in the bathroom."

"O-okay," he whispers, unsure if he's actually heard as he spins on his heels and flees to the guest room where his backpack is.

He hadn't managed to fit a lot of clothes in his backpack, and he's worn everything already. If he was still on the streets, it would've been about time to actually wash his clothes at the laundromat.

He gets dressed in the cleanest clothes he has, biting his lip as he dumps his backpack on the bed. He sorts out the clothes into a pile and shoves everything else back into the backpack before tucking that under the bed. He makes sure both his sets of his uniform are in the pile because they're in desperate need of a wash. He's a bit afraid the wrinkles in the fabric are gonna be permanent at this point.

"He really doesn't mind washing them," Oboro's voice tells him from his side. He hears the ghost before he feels his presence. "You really gotta stop second guessing yourself. They're not the kinda people to offer something if they don't have intentions of following through. He *wants* to help you out."

"I feel bad," Izuku admits softly, "I'm not used to people wanting to help."

"I know," the ghost breathes out, and Izuku hears the sadness in it. "But they really do want to help you. And they will. As long as you're willing to let them, they will help you."

Izuku shakes his head, pushing down the nagging disbelief before finally looking over at the ghost, "are you coming with us to the station?"

"Oh, thank God," the ghost lets out a breathy laugh, "I thought I was going to have to stay here and watch 'zashi do his laundry dance. I'm honestly so surprised he doesn't get noise complaints by how loud he's got American music playing whenever he does literally any chores."

"Like you wouldn't have followed us anyways," Izuku accuses with a snort of laughter, pretending he hadn't heard the ghost complaining

about his teacher. “If I didn’t want you around, I’d tell you. Besides, at this point, you’re already just as in this as I am. Guess you’re stuck with me just as much as I’m stuck with you now, huh?”

“Yeah,” Oboro grins, a fond look on his face. “Guess so, Izu.”

“If you are coming, just know I won’t be able to talk to you much. I mean, I think Sensei’s already pretty suspicious of me. And I did just get caught yelling at no one—he probably thinks I’m insane or something. I can’t add any more fuel to that fire.”

“Seen but not heard,” Oboro pouts, but nods his head. “Got it. Emotional support then.”

“Sure,” Izuku can’t help but laugh, “You’re my emotional support ghost then.”

“Okay, you say that sarcastically, but I literally am!” The ghost laughs. “Now c’mon. The faster you get this over with the better, yeah?”

Izuku gives a nod, watching as the ghost leaves ahead of him, content with the silent answer. Izuku lingers for just a second, shooting one last frown back at the pile of clothes before turning on his heels and leaving the room. He keeps the door cracked open because he’s got no idea if there’s a cat in the room or not, and he doesn’t want to lock anyone inside.

When Izuku finally makes it to the living room, Aizawa-Sensei is reclined back against the couch, scrolling through his phone. When he angles his head just right, he can see Present Mic stood at the kitchen sink, probably washing the dishes. He feels bad that he’s eaten two meals with them thus far, and hadn’t offered to help tidy up either time. He will later—the next meal.

“Ready, Midoriya?”

Izuku jolts in surprise, turning his head to see his homeroom teacher watching him. He gives a nod, it’s pretty unconvincing if the way Aizawa-Sensei's frown deepens slightly. The dark-haired man sighs as he pushes himself up off the couch, “I promise nothing is going to happen, Izuku. I’ll be with you every step of the way. It’s rational to be nervous, just remember you’re not fighting this alone anymore.”

Aizawa-Sensei's hand claps over his shoulder, giving a light comforting squeeze as he walks past. The touch is gone as fast as it appeared, but it had done as intended. He’s not calmed down by any

means, but it had comforted him. He believes his teacher, but he's still nervous. This is... it's a lot.

The teen turns to trail off after his teacher, pausing at the door to pull on his own shoes just as Sensei is doing.

When they both have their shoes on, Aizawa-Sense regards Izuku for a second before turning to face the apartment. “We’re leaving, ‘zashi,” Aizawa-Sensei calls gruffly into the apartment. “We’ll be back later.”

“’kay! Good luck!” is the chirped reply, barely heard over the sound of the kitchen tap running.

Oboro arrives just as Aizawa-Sensei turns back to the door, pulling it open and ushering Izuku out. The ghost joins him at his side, falling into step on the side opposite to Aizawa-Sensei. Izuku is sandwiched in between them, but he feels safe there for some reason.

“We’re taking the car,” Aizawa-Sensei tells him as they walk down the hall together. “The precinct isn’t too far, but it’ll be easier and faster than walking.”

“Okay,” Izuku hums, because he’s not going to complain.

He’s quiet on the car ride. Aizawa-Sensei lets Izuku sit in the passenger’s seat, and Oboro pouts as he clambers into the backseat, flopping against the seat with a playful protest of ‘I’m older than you, why’m I in the backseat? What, just because I’m not actually *here*, because I’m a *ghost*, I lose front seat privileges?’

Izuku has to turn to look out the window to hide his smile.

It doesn’t take long to arrive at the police station. Aizawa-Sensei parks in a visitor's parking lot, getting out of the car without a word. He pauses, glancing back at Izuku before shutting his car door, which spurs the teenager on. He’s quick to undo his seatbelt and stumble out of the car after his Sensei. Oboro follows suit, hands tucked in his pockets as he follows at Izuku’s side.

The police station is bustling with life. There’re a couple villains and low-level thugs in cuffs waiting to be processed, and officers working at their desks, attention spread between their work and keeping an eye on the criminals. Aizawa-Sensei doesn’t pause in his steps, and Izuku has to hurry along to keep up and not lose his teacher in the precinct.

Aizawa-Sensei seems familiar with the police station, but he probably shouldn't find that surprising considering he's an underground hero. He probably works closely with them— if mainstream Pros do, then underground Heros certainly do.

Izuku follows along on his teacher's heels, and Oboro keeps close to Izuku. A permanent chill that's following him along. He's gotten used to Oboro's cold presence— it hardly even bothers him anymore. It's almost comforting at this point.

Aizawa-Sensei stops in front of an office, and Izuku almost runs into his back. He manages to freeze just before running into his teacher, prompting a snort of laughter from the ghost who'd watched, but hadn't warned him. Thankfully, Aizawa-Sensei doesn't seem to notice him almost running into his back, nor the fact Izuku glares back behind himself.

"Ready, Kid?" the man asks finally, hand raised and with his bent finger joints poised to knock.

Izuku nods silently and the man nods in return, tapping his pointer finger joint against the door. It's not long until a voice is heard inviting them in, and Aizawa-Sensei doesn't waste a second before pulling the door open and ushering Izuku in first.

The man sitting behind the desk scans the two of them—first Aizawa-Sensei, where the man's lips quirk up faintly. "Aizawa," he greets kindly before looking towards Izuku where he studies him a little closer, almost thoughtfully.

Izuku stares right back, this man... looks familiar. He's wearing a white dress shirt, and a blue tie. He looks so familiar but... he can't figure out why.

"Tsukauchi," Sensei greets in return, slinking further into the room, "this is Midoriya Izuku, the kid I was talking about. Midoriya, this is Detective Tsukauchi Naomasa. He's gonna help us sort out your fostering case and the situation with your mother."

"Midoriya Izuku?" the detective cocks his head before his eyes light up with understanding, "oh, right, you're All Might's kid, aren't you? We met—after the USJ attack. Remember?"

Oh. Yes, he does remember that. He remembers the detective coming in—All Might being glad to see him. Another person who knew about his weakened form. A friend of All Might's.

“All Might’s kid?” Aizawa-Sensei's voice goes characteristically stern, and Izuku tenses at his side. Oh. Oh no. Aizawa-Sensei didn’t know that All Might was his mentor... that he and All Might had gotten close due to One for All. This could go very, very poorly. “You're mistaken, Tsukauchi. This is my kid, from my class. Why would Midoriya be that blonde idiot’s kid?”

The detective blinks, eyes casting from Aizawa-Sensei's tense frame to Izuku’s pleading one.

“Right,” the detective nods slowly, a sheepish, toothy smile lifting to his face, “I misspoke. I met the kid with All Might. In Recovery Girl’s office after the USJ. He found out about All Might’s little problem, so I just... You’re right, sorry, Aizawa. Nice to meet you again, Midoriya.”

“Likewise,” Izuku forces out. He’s certain his voice comes out breathy —and Sensei might even hear the fear in his tone if the thoughtful glance shot at him is anything to go off.

“You know about All Might’s time limit?” Sensei asks slowly, one eyebrow arched in question. “I thought that was confidential.”

“Y-yeah,” Izuku nods. “I, uhm, I found out before school started. A-after a villain attack that he, uhm, that he saved me from.”

Aizawa-Sensei's face pinches in masked worry at that, and even the detective looks confused and vaguely concerned. No one knew about the villain attack but himself, All Might and Oboro, who Izuku is sure doesn’t really count. Maybe it’s a mistake talking about it—but the last thing he needs right now is to be caught in a lie by Aizawa-Sensei.

There’s a tense moment of silence, but thankfully the detective breaks it, “so, I’ve got a social worker on the way to be a part of this conversation. It’s pretty basic stuff—an interview with the kid. I’ll ask some questions, and so will his social worker. She’ll have some requirements for you regarding the kid—probably a doctor’s visit for Midoriya, since it’s neglect we’re looking at and he did spend some time living on the street. There will probably be a couple home visits and check-ins, but she’ll explain all this better than I can.”

The detective pauses, taking a second to contemplate like he’s running through a mental checklist of points he needs to bring up to them. “Since he wants to stay with you, and you are a licensed foster parent, even if it’s just for emergency placements, I’ll look into your license; make sure everything is up to date for long-term fostering and all that so we aren’t looking at any problems in the future, and if all goes well,

we'll have Midoriya leaving with you by the end of this."

"Right," Sensei turns away from Izuku to nod at the detective. His teacher carries on moving into the room, collapsing into one of the chairs opposite the detective's on the other side of the desk. Izuku follows suit awkwardly, settling carefully into the chair.

"While we wait though, maybe you could tell me a bit about your mother?"

"W-why?" Izuku stutters out, glancing to his teacher despite the question being aimed at the detective.

"Kid..." Aizawa-Sensei turns a bit to consider him thoughtfully, voice softening from the hardness he'd addressed the detective with, "what your mother did to you was against the law. Not only did she abandon you, she's been neglecting you for years."

"She didn't neglect me," Izuku shakes his head, fiddling with his fingers. He couldn't argue the abandonment, but he could the neglect. "I told you, Sensei; I was taken care of. I ate, and had a roof over my head. My clothes always fit, and I had toys and stuff growing up."

"But she wasn't around," his teacher summarizes, knowing from the night before. "That's still neglect, Izuku. Psychological and emotional neglect are just as real as physical neglect."

"She was working to provide," Izuku whispers out, despite the clawing of truth in his stomach. He knew she wasn't around—and sure, it was because she was working to provide, but she also didn't want to be around him either. He knew that. He wasn't an idiot—he could put two and two together, even if it hurt to do so.

"That doesn't excuse her actions," his teacher shakes his head. "You're a child, Izuku. The whole world shouldn't be falling onto your shoulders, and I'm sorry it has been. What your mother did, leaving the way she did, should be punished. She should face the consequences for her actions. For how her actions affected you."

He doesn't like the sound of that. He loves his mom. She'd taken care of him through everything—his special ability and his Quirklessness. His father had jumped ship as soon as it started getting hard, but she'd stayed. She provided for him. He never went without, and he was always taken care of. That's what moms do, right?

"What kind of consequences?" Izuku asks, attention now angling back

to the detective, who'd been silently watching them.

He looks almost surprised to be addressed, clearing his throat, "well... fines, or possibly jailtime. It depends on the severity of the neglect case—but abandonment is pretty urgent. Plus there's the fact that due to her leaving as she did, you lost your home and ended up on the streets, which is child endangerment as well. Anything could've happened out there, Midoriya."

The detective bites his lip, looking briefly at Aizawa-Sensei before focusing back on Izuku, "when your social worker arrives, we'll talk more about that. Neither I, or Aizawa have as good a handle on cases like yours. For now, we'll try to focus on finding your mother."

Izuku nods hesitantly.

"So, you have no idea where she could've gone?"

"No," Izuku sighs out. "She... I called her work, and they said she resigned a few weeks prior to our landlord tell me our rent was overdue. I hadn't... I—" Izuku swallows, feeling his cheeks heat up as he tugs on a lose threat on his jeans, "I hadn't seen her since before school started. She could be... w-we don't have any living family, and I doubt her closest friend even knows what's going on—or, uhm, if she does, she hasn't mentioned it."

"Does this close friend have a name? It would be useful in trying to locate your mother. Any leads will help."

"Bakugou," Izuku huffs out under his breath. He can feel Aizawa-Sensei's eyes snap in his direction, "Bakugou Mitsuki. She... I practically grew up with them. Kacchan— her son, Katsuki— and I were best friends until..." he lets his voice fade off, glancing at Aizawa-Sensei. The man gives a slow, understanding nod because he does know about the falling out due to Izuku's Quirklessness. "A-anyways, we drifted apart, I guess. I haven't seen her in... well, probably a couple years now. Kacchan and I don't talk and I don't know if she and my mother are even friends anymore."

The detective nods, writing something down in a notepad that he pulls from the corner of his desk.

"And your father, where is he in all this?"

Izuku tenses up, glaring down at his lap, "he left when I was five. My mom said he moved to America when I asked, but I don't know if that

was legit, or her just trying to get me to stop asking questions. He, ah, his name is Midoriya Hisashi."

"Okay," the detective gives a nod, writing that down as well. "Thank you. Now, do you have any idea why your mother would've left you, Midoriya?"

Yes. "No."

The detective looks up, blinking at the teen. He studies him for a second, a frown tugging at his lips. "That's a lie."

The detective seems just as surprised by his own words as Izuku, hand lifting to rub at the back of his neck sheepishly, "ah, sorry about that."

"Lie?" Izuku jerks up. "W-what?"

"My Quirk," the detective informs regretfully, smiling apologetically between the teen and the teacher at his side, "I'm sorry, Kid. I forgot to tell you about it. My Quirk is called Lie Detector. I didn't mean to use my Quirk—especially not without warning you beforehand, but sometimes it just... *happens*. Usually when someone says something completely untrue."

"So it's involuntary?" Izuku asks slowly, heart pounding in his chest at being caught in a lie, but interest piqued because that's a *cool* Quirk. He feels Aizawa-Sensei's eyes on him, but refuses to look away from the detective. He doesn't want to know what his teacher is thinking.

"Sorta," the detective gives a light smile, "it's only involuntary when it's a blatant lie. I have the ability to turn it off and on, but sometimes.... well, sometimes Quirks just have a mind of their own—it's prompted by me asking a question while the Quirk is active, and it only works through vocal answers from the person the question is aimed at. It doesn't work with shakes of the head, or nods. Strictly vocal."

"So, it's a voice type, just instead of your voice, it's other people's voices? But there must be some kind of que in your own voice too that activates the Quirk for those who are the target, so it technically is a voice Quirk all around."

"You're a nerd," Oboro huffs from somewhere behind him, but Izuku is focused on the detective.

"Yeah, uh," the detective rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck, "I

suppose you could look at it that way. It works mostly the same as a polygraph. It takes more effort to lie, so like a polygraph, where it reads your blood pressure, pulse, respiration, and skin conductivity, my Quirk hears frequency changes in an individual's voice when they lie."

"That's so cool," Izuku breathes out, itching to write it all down in his notebook. The boy opens his mouth to ask another question, but promptly shuts it when there's another steady knock on the office door. Like before, the detective invites the person in, standing to greet the woman who steps in.

She's an older lady. Maybe mid to late forties. She smiles kindly, greeting the detective with a handshake. She's clutching a few file folders to her chest with her other hand.

"Aizawa, Midoriya, this is Miura Annaisha. She's one of the social workers from child protective services who works in close contact with the police. Miura-San, this is Aizawa Shota, Pro Hero: Eraserhead and Midoriya Izuku."

"Hello," the woman smiles, gaze casting over Aizawa-Sensei before dropping to where Izuku had almost sunken into his chair. Her gaze lingers, but she smiles widely in greeting.

It's a long, boring process.

From there, the four of them (and the ghost) move into an interrogation room where Izuku feels like he's suffocating under all the questions.

They're kind—surprisingly so. He's not used to adults being so cautious and kind to him, but then again, they probably think he's a damaged, trauma ridden kid and—well, he's doesn't really know where he stands. He still feels pretty numb, and he knows at some point all this will start to *feel* real, and he's not sure what he'll do then.

The woman, incredibly kind and soft-spoken, talks him through the process.

She'd dug into his family tree before leaving the social services office, and hadn't found any living relatives besides his mother and father—but their whereabouts were unknown. She's regretful as she tells him, voice lowering to a gentle tone as if he'll completely break down—but honestly, he'd expected as much.

If she's surprised by his indifference, she doesn't say anything.

She asks a lot of questions—some seeming out of place, like *how he was liking school*, while others are geared towards the situation, *how long were you on the street before being found by Aizawa-San?*

She asks him about Aizawa-Sensei—how he's treating him, about his husband, their apartment, the room he's staying in. She asks if he feels safe there, and even goes as far as to ask about how he feels about the cats that Present Mic and Aizawa-Sensei have.

It seems odd, overly personal, but he answers honestly. He doesn't have a single negative thing to say about any of it—in fact, he takes that time expresses his gratitude and how thankful he is that they're willing to take him in, knowing his cheeks light up in a nervous flush as his Sensei's expression softens slightly.

Izuku thinks she's trying to get a feel for him. Gauge his personality and pick him apart before anything more happens. She's probably also observing Aizawa-Sensei, who hardly moves, gaze flickering between the teenager and the social working in interest. He wishes her good luck if she's trying to read him too.

For the most part, the detective and his teacher just watch on—listening to the conversation, absorbing it, without adding anything.

Until the woman's attention is turned onto Aizawa-Sensei.

As the detective had said, the woman does had guidelines for his teacher to follow. The teacher just nods along with everything she spouts out, almost like he'd expected it all.

It's a long list of requirements that need to be met before she'll sign off on a permanent placement. Izuku's surprised by how much is going into this, but no one else seems to be.

The woman talks about home visits, where their residence will be inspected to make sure it's a suitable place for a teenager to live and grow. There will be more in-depth interviews between Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic, but Aizawa-Sensei assures they'll jump through whatever hoops she has if it means Izuku can stay with them for the long run.

Izuku is most surprised by the stern demand that he be seen by a medical doctor— she worries openly of fears of malnutrition from his time living alone in the apartment— how she knows he hadn't eaten a

lot, he doesn't know— as well as the fact he's been homeless, even if just for such a short time. She fusses good-naturedly and Aizawa-Sensei nods in total *agreement*.

"We have plans to already," the man assures without glancing at Izuku, "Shuzenji Chiyo, Recovery Girl, Yuuei's nurse, will be doing a full physical. We share the same concerns. I also have him seeing our school Guidance counselor two days a week already."

"Good," the woman hums, pleased with that.

In the end, she decides she'll approve the fostering, but just for a two-week trial period. At the end of the two-weeks, she'll decide whether Izuku is better off staying with his teachers permanently until the case of his mother is sorted out, or whether he's better off somewhere else —and the thought of being forced to leave almost sends him into a panic attack.

The only thing that drags him out of the attack is his teacher's knee pressing against his own under the table, grounding him back to the real world. Everyone seems to have noticed, but no one mentions it, thankfully.

The teen sits quietly as his teacher signs off on some temporary fostering paperwork. Everything seems to have checked out, and as of that signature, for the next two weeks, Aizawa-Sensei will be his guardian.

The adults talk around him, but he's already emotionally drained. This was a lot. A lot of questions. A lot of prying. He just... he wants to go *home*- no, wait... he means back to Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic's apartment.

Oboro stands against the wall across from where he's sitting. He's stood perfectly between the Detective and the social worker, mouth pressed in a concerned line.

"You okay?" the ghost asks slowly, maybe seeing something in Izuku the others don't. The ghost has seen a lot from him—they're close in a personal way, he wouldn't be surprised if the ghost was picking up on something no one else was.

Izuku gives a nod, ducking his head down so his curls block his eyes.

Before Izuku knows, Aizawa-Sensei is ushering him up, leading him through the precinct after quick valedictions. He's led out by a

grounding hand between his shoulders, just like when his teacher had directed him to his apartment last night. It's a comforting touch, and Izuku loves it.

They get into the car silently, where his teacher finally releases a sigh.

"That was tiring," the man huffs, head thumping back against the headrest.

Izuku just nods, curling into himself. Oboro is uncharacteristically quiet in the backseat, just looking between Izuku and his teacher. He can see the ghost in the rearview mirror.

They sit in silence for a moment before Aizawa-Sensei starts the car, pulling onto the road. There's traffic—Izuku watches out his window as nothing moves. It must be the after-work rush of everyone trying to get home.

The teen stills at the thought before slowly pulling his phone out of his pocket. He winces as he turns it on, drawing in a stuttered breath as he glares down at the time.

"Kid?" Aizawa-Sensei prompts slowly, "what?"

"I'm late," Izuku shakes his head, feeling awful.

"Late?" Aizawa-Sensei blinks, angling to face the kid. "For what?"

He bites his lip, looking away from his teacher's prying eyes. They're not moving, so it's not like his Sensei will be focused on the traffic.

"After I realized my mom was... that I wasn't going to be able to f-feed myself for much longer, I... I uhm, I started looking for a way to make some money b-because I knew I couldn't, y'know, I couldn't *steal* anything, it goes against my morals... so I sorta got a job."

"A job?" his teacher's voice takes an uncertain edge.

He doesn't say anything else for a second, lost in thought before a deep frown tug at his lips, "Izuku..." his name comes out like a warning, displeased, and the slow, cautious drawl as he continues tells Izuku his teacher already has a pretty good idea where this is going, and he doesn't *like* it, "where did you find the time to work between school, quirk training, counseling and sleeping?"

"A-after school," Izuku bites his lip, "I uhm, I really needed money,

Sensei... I tried everywhere in my neighborhood to find someone who'd hire me... b-but no one would, and I was desperate."

"How much were you working, Midoriya?"

"T-three hours," his teacher's expression relaxes a little and Izuku winces as he continues, "e-everyday."

There's a heavy silence in the car. Izuku thinks about fleeing for just a second before his teacher forces out a breath, "you worked twenty-three hours a week on top of forty-hours of school, and at least five additional hours of counseling and Quirk training *at least*?"

Izuku nods meekly, ducking his head.

"Christ, Kid," Aizawa-Sensei huffs, fingers drumming on the steering wheel as he looked away from the teen, easing up behind the car ahead of them. "No wonder you were dead on your feet. I'm sorry I didn't notice sooner."

"It's not your fault," Izuku shakes his head. "It... it wasn't that bad. It wasn't an official job, more of an... under the table kind of thing—" the teen freezes abruptly, mouth drying out as he catches his teacher's thoughtful gaze.

He'd just told his pro-hero teacher that he was working an illegal, under the table job. What if they got in trouble for helping him out? The thought makes him feel like he's suffocating. "Please don't be mad, Sensei. T-they were just trying to help me, and they were so kind and, and, I did the work, and t-they paid me for the work. We didn't do anything b-bad, just... Y-you can't get them in trouble—please, they didn't... I didn't mean too—"

"Izuku," his teacher's hand is on his knee, and *when* had it gotten there? Sensei's hand squeezes lightly, as if he can tell Izuku's gaze is locked on it. "Take a breath, alright? *You're* not in trouble, and *they're* not in trouble, okay? Just... just breathe before you pass out."

He sucks in a breath, his teacher's gruff praises going in one ear and out the other as he tries to calm himself down. Oboro's hand is by his shoulder; snaked in between the side of the car and the headrest. He's not touching, but Izuku can feel the chill as he hovers as emotional support. His soft, soothing words are equally as unhelpful as Sensei's. He can only focus on sucking in oxygen, not on the words being said to him.

“Good, Problem Child,” Sensei hums out calmly, “you’re fine. It’s okay.”

He takes another breath, then another before he finally nods. It’s slow and shaky, hands wringing together before interlocking and dropping into his lap. He draws in a few more huffs of air before finally glancing over at his teacher.

“You good, Kid?”

“Yeah,” the teen nods stiffly, voice shaky, “I’m sorry. I just... they really helped me out, and now I’m late for my shift. And I... I ratted them out, and I know you’re a pro, I-I just told you we were doing it and it’s... it’s *illegal* for them to—b-but I asked for help and they gave it to me...”

“No one’s in trouble,” his teacher repeats firmly. “I promise, Kid, I’m not going to do anything. Maybe it’s illegal, but all I see is someone helping out a kid in need. Someone helping one of *my* kids out and I’m not going to fault them for doing something I failed to do.”

Izuku’s lip wobbles, but he brushes the tears away before they fall. He feels overwhelmed. First the police station and the fostering stuff, and now this. He’s so tired. “You didn’t fail.”

“I did,” the man disagrees with a glance over. “I failed you, Midoriya. I should’ve done more the second I realized something was off. That’s on me, but I won’t let it happen again.”

There’s a pause, traffic moves a bit before freezing up again. His teacher drums a single finger against the steering wheel, opposite palm supporting his chin, elbow braced on the edge of the car door, as he drives.

Izuku’s not sure what else to say, and the ghost in the backseat is just as quiet. It’s Aizawa-Sensei who breaks the silence, casting a cautious look over at him the hardly lingers for a second before his eyes are back on the road, “now, where was it you worked? We should stop in so they aren’t worried about you.”

Izuku wants to protest, he wants to not let the Pro hero anywhere near the kind family who’d helped him, even if they’d done it illegally. They’d helped him when he was desperate, and he’d protect them now.

But at the same time, there’s that deep-seated trust in his teacher after

just over a month of knowing him. He trusts Aizawa-Sensei, and he really does want to apologize for missing his shift.

So, he cracks and spills the location.

Izuku walks into the small café with his teacher a step behind him. It's still bustling with life, all six tables filled with chatting patrons, and the service line four people deep. He'd be on his last hour of work had he arrived on time, and the guilt nags in his chest.

"Izuku!" the woman who'd hired him, the old woman who paid him and kept an eye on him greets, relief in her eyes. "Thank Goodness, we were worried when you didn't come in. Thought something happened to you."

"I'm okay," the teen smiles softly, moving through the crowds to join her at the side counter where all the coffee machines are. "I'm sorry I couldn't come in."

"Don't worry about it, Izuku," she tells him, a soft smile shot in his direction as she carries on with her work. It's almost like magic how fast she can work the machine, turning out perfect drinks. "You know this was never a set schedule thing, you're just our extra hands. So long as you're okay, I'm happy."

She hands over a cappuccino to a man waiting before turning back to the teen, finally noticing the grouchy looking man stood behind him, hands tucked in his pockets. Her eyebrow arches as she blinks at him, "who's your friend, dear?"

One of the other family members, a young man, ushers the woman out from behind the counter, taking over for her. She pauses beside Izuku, eyeing his teacher thoughtfully. Aizawa-Sensei doesn't waver under her stare, just returns it with respect.

"O-oh," the teen looks back. Aizawa-Sensei cocks his attention down at the teen, catching his eye before Izuku turns back, "this is Aizawa-Sensei, uhm, one of my teachers. I'm... I'll be staying with him for a while."

"Oh," the woman breaths out, pausing in what she's doing. She regards them both carefully before nodding, "that's good to hear, Izuku. We were starting to get worried about your situation... You're looking more rested now though. I'm glad you've got somewhere to be. I guess that means we probably won't be seeing you every day now, huh?"

Izuku shakes his head with a tiny smile, “I have to focus on my school work if I’m going to become a Pro Hero like All Might and my Sensei. Thank you for helping me out.” He ducks into a bow, feeling the woman’s hand ruffle his hair after just a second of his head being angled downwards.

He perks back up with her hand, returning her smile.

“Well, if the hero thing doesn’t work out for you, you’ve always got a job here. An official job, whenever you want it. But you can still come in and help out whenever you feel like it, we won’t say no to extra hands.”

“Thank you,” Izuku grins. It means a lot—even if it’s an empty offer.

The woman nods before turning towards Sensei, who'd been quiet. “You take care of this boy, y’hear?”

“Of course,” Sensei nods. There’s a second where Izuku thinks his teacher is going to lead him out again, but to his surprise, the man is arching forwards into a bow much like Izuku’s. The teen jumps, stumbling backwards. He thinks he might squeak out his teacher’s name, but he can’t be sure.

At his side, the old woman blinks in confusion, glancing uncertainly at Izuku before looking back at the Hero, eyeing him. “Thank you,” Aizawa-Sensei says honestly, still bent over in the bow, “for taking care of my student where I failed too.”

There’s another second of stunned silence—Izuku's feels his cheeks heat up, but there’s something so... heartening about the scene. About what Aizawa-Sensei had just done, was currently doing, for him.

He’d never pegged Aizawa-Sensei as someone who would bow down so easily, and certainly not to someone he’d just met, unprompted. There was no validation to this—he wasn’t putting on a show for someone, he was simply showing respect and gratitude.

Gratitude to a woman whom he’d just met, simply because she’d been kind to Izuku—had looked after him when he’d been at his lowest... it makes Izuku’s insides feel like mush. No more than half an hour ago, Izuku had been terrified that Sensei was going to have them arrested for working out a side-deal with him, but now here his teacher was showing bowed respectfully with nothing but thanks on his lips.

“None of that,” the woman huffs with a shake of her head. Her

fingertips hook under Aizawa-Sensei's shoulder, pushing him up, which he easily complies, “up, up. We would’ve helped Izuku either way. He’s a bright, hardworking boy. He did more for me than I did for him.”

The woman shoots Izuku a fond look before catching Aizawa-Sensei's eyes again, “now, I doubt you’re here to work, so was there anything I could get you before you’re off again? Busy hero schedules and all that, right?”

Aizawa-Sensei ordered a black coffee for himself, a hot chocolate for Izuku, and a Matcha tea for Present Mic. This was followed up by the old woman slipping Izuku a paper bag of baked goods with a light smile, “you remember us when you’re a famous Hero, okay? Come visit every once and a while too.”

Izuku promises to do just that under his breath. He feels lighter than he had in weeks—everything was getting sorted out one by one and it was weight after weight lifted from his shoulders.

“C’mon, Kid,” Aizawa-Sensei called, completely unaware—or maybe feigning ignorance for Izuku’s sake as he balances three to-go cups, stood by the door. “’zashi’s waiting.”

Izuku follows after him, throwing a wave over his shoulder before taking his cup from his Sensei.

“Thank you,” Izuku whispers over the rim of his to-go cup lid, barely audible. Sensei somehow hears it, head ducking in a hardly noticeable nod. Izuku’s not entirely sure what he’s really thanking his Sensei for—he just knows the man deserves it.

“First, I get stuck in the backseat, and then I don’t get hot chocolate?” Izuku hides a smile behind his cup as he takes a sip, settling into his car seat. Oboro had decided to stay in the car considering how crowded the cafe was. He didn't want to be phasing though people at every step. “Man, being a ghost *blows*. I don't recommend death, Izu. Avoid it, alright?”

Despite his words, the ghost flashes a wide grin, clearly pleased at getting a positive reaction.

“Ready to head home, Problem Child?”

Izuku nods, smile softening as he watches his teacher chug his coffee while simultaneously trying to slot Present Mic’s tea into the

cupholder.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter didn't have much actual plot-- it was mostly just to tie up some loose ends from the last couple chapters. Still over 10k worth of words, but idk how much I like it? Sorry if it's not realistic, but I tried! I don't know a lot about the law or fostering in Japan. I tried to research, but everything just kept circling back to Canadian laws and fostering guidelines.

Also, that's only the tip of the iceburg for my boy Blanket's weird personality. The little shit legit sneaks up behind you and grabs your ass when you least expect it. Well, mine at least-- and I kid you not, my family did not believe me until my mom saw it!

That last scene with Sho bowing to the cafe owner came from my irl friend who's been reading along before I post these. I just thought the idea was adorable, so it made it into the final edit! If you've got something you wanna see, feel free to comment it! I'll try and make it happen, and I'll credit you too :D

As always, thanks so much for reading! Comments and kudos are greatly appreciated and motivate me to keep working on this! I love this fic, and I'm so glad you guys are liking it too! ＜3

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello!

We've got a new PoV sprinkled in this chapter (it's a one-time thing for now, but I might write them again later depending), and I've been reading comments, so hopefully this'll clear up some of the questions you guys've had! More fluff in this chapter because I couldn't resist!

I hope you all like this update :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The evening they return home from the precinct, Aizawa-Sensei his newly appointed guardian for the time being, it's surprisingly uneventful.

Izuku is still sipping his hot chocolate as his homeroom teacher ushers him into the apartment building. It's starting to get dark around them, but Izuku can't be bothered to shuffle the things he's holding around in order to tug his phone out of his pocket and check the actual time.

Just a step or so behind, Aizawa-Sensei keeps up, hand holding Present Mic's matcha tea, and his now empty cup. Izuku's holding the small paper bag of sweets they'd been given, which Aizawa-Sensei had assured in the car that they could eat after dinner, since Present Mic would *lose his shit*, Sensei's words entirely, if they ruined their appetites with treats before dinner.

Oboro solemnly nods in agreement before a smile curls onto his lips.

The ghost hardly wastes a second before he'd reciting the last time Present Mic had caught Aizawa-Sensei ruining his appetite, laughing his way through the reenacted scolding the dark-haired man had received, even going as far as to poorly mimic each of the teacher's voices.

The ghost finishes off his story as they arrive outside the apartment door, dragging his fingers up through his cloudy blue locks with a sigh of laughter, "I kid you not, Izu, he hasn't had a single one of those jelly pouch things before dinner since that day. 'zashi's honestly terrifying when he wants to be, try'n stay on his good side."

Izuku refrains from laughing along as his teacher pauses in front of the apartment door, unlocking it, blissfully unaware of the stories being fed to Izuku. He does angle his head in question when he catches the smile the teen can't wipe off his face.

The teacher clearly decides better than to question it, just gestures the teen inside.

They kick off their shoes, Izuku more cautious of his, making sure they're pushed up against the wall neatly, while Aizawa-Sensei seems to not care. His teacher steps away and without a second thought, the teen lines his boots up alongside his own and Present Mic's.

Oboro lets out a fond huff behind him, and Aizawa-Sensei raises an eyebrow that has heat flooding to Izuku's cheeks, but his teacher doesn't mention it.

The apartment is quiet, and for a second, Izuku thinks maybe Present Mic had left at some point, but then he smells something tasty wafting from the kitchen. "We're home," Aizawa-Sensei calls out, waiting for an answer that doesn't come.

He doesn't seem phased by it, just trails into the kitchen with Izuku following a step behind.

Aizawa-Sensei pauses in the doorway—watching the blonde hero who doesn't turn towards them. He's humming to himself, working on something at the counter.

Izuku moves to enter the kitchen, but Aizawa-Sensei's arm reaches out, blocking him at chest level. Izuku stalls, blinking in confusion as his Sensei reaches for the light switch, flicking it off and then back on quickly—and Present Mic spins towards them looking like a deer caught in the headlights.

His face breaks out into a grin when he spots Izuku, but he doesn't say anything.

"His hearing aids are out," Aizawa-Sensei explains as he finally steps into the kitchen, joining his husband at his side. He passes the tea over and Present Mic smiles widely before his hand lifts to his chin before falling forwards, keeping his palm flat as he does so. That seems to be the end of the gesture, because then he's taking a sip of the drink.

"That means thank you," Oboro tells him, watching over Izuku's

shoulder. “I should probably teach you the basics if they don’t, huh?”

The teen twitches to nod back at the ghost, but doesn’t make a move to do so.

Aizawa-Sensei nods in response to Present Mic, glancing back at Izuku who’s still stood in the doorway. The teen clutches at the bag of baked goods, and holds his almost finished hot chocolate close.

His gaze doesn’t linger long before he’s looking back when Present Mic taps his shoulder and starts signing faster. Aizawa-Sensei's eyes follow the gestures, and he nods again, not signing anything back this time. “I’ll be right back, Kid. I’m going to grab his hearing aids. They’re charging.”

“Okay,” Izuku nods, stepping into the kitchen finally as Aizawa-Sensei steps out. Oboro dodges out of the way, throwing himself to the side lest he risk phasing through Aizawa-Sensei. It’s hilarious.

Izuku watches his homeroom teacher leave down the hall, disappearing into one of the rooms at the end of the hallway. He’d only seen the guest room and the bathroom, but one of the remaining doors is bound to be their bedroom.

He turns back when the teacher is gone from his sight.

Present Mic shoots him an inviting glance that puts the teenager at ease. Izuku finally joins him in the room, handing him the paper bag to look in before taking his hot chocolate to the table. He's not sure what to say-- especially when his teacher can't hear him. Does Present Mic know how to read lips? It doesn't matter much anyways, because the blonde-haired Pro Hero is turning back to whatever it was he'd been making.

Aizawa-Sensei isn’t gone long, returning just second later with two white hearing aids in his hand. He stops at Present Mic's side, and the other Pro seems to feel the presence beside him because he turns to look at Aizawa-Sensei. The underground Hero passes the hearing aids to Present Mic, and Izuku ducks his attention when the blonde hero presses a thankful kiss to the underground hero’s cheek. It’s cute, don’t get him wrong but—but it’s also his teachers and that’s... well, that’s a little weird to see.

“Sorry about that, Listener,” Present Mic chirps, and Izuku forces his attention back up, watching as the man pressed the second hearing aid into his ear. Aizawa-Sensei is leaned over, looking at whatever the

voice Hero had been preparing. “I don’t like to talk when I can’t hear myself since I’m not as aware of what my Quirk is doing. But that doesn’t mean we can’t talk! I can read lips, so just make sure I can see ya before askin' me anything when they're out, 'kay?”

Izuku nods, despite his thoughts lingering on Present Mic’s words.

His hesitance to not speak when he can’t hear makes a lot of sense.

Izuku has a bunch of pages on Present Mic in his Analysis notebook.

He’d extensively done research when he was little, when he’d first stumbled upon videos of the voice hero fighting a villain on YouTube. From there, he’s sorta... deep dived into him. That had led him to *Put Your Hands Up* radio, and he’d been a dutiful listener every Friday for years. He’d stopped listening in his second year of Junior High, just because things started getting harder around then, and he was constantly overwhelmed with school work and trying to keep himself afloat since his teacher didn’t care if a Quirkless kid like him failed or not.

Plus, he’d seen how destructive the Quirk could be.

People who thought Present Mic just screamed and the Quirk was active were so completely wrong, it wasn’t even funny. The teen can’t even imagine what the Pro does to keep it in check—his Quirk is basically his voice, always there and constantly active. It takes loads of practice and mental strength to be able to constantly keep it neural. Honestly, people don’t give Present Mic nearly enough credit for his Quirk control.

He hadn’t known, however, that Present Mic was deaf, or, hard of hearing at least.

He wonders now how that plays into his Quirk. Had he always been deaf? Was it a result of his Quirk due to long term usage? Were the headphones on his Hero costume specially made to act like hearing aids as well? He’d never seen the teacher without them on at school, and he’s not sure how comfortable the hearing aids he just put in would be pressed under the headphones—

“Izuku,” Oboro’s voice breaks him off from his thoughts. “You’re mumbling again.”

The teen snaps his jaw shut, gaze shooting up to apologize but to his surprise, the teachers are both at the counter still. They’re not staring

at him like he's insane. They weren't trying to break him out of it like everyone else. They're not concerned in the slightest that he's sitting at the table, clutching at a now cold hot chocolate, muttering to himself.

"S-sorry," he still mutters out quietly. He knows they can hear him, but neither really acknowledges it. Present Mic just glances back briefly, smiling lightly before his attention is back on whatever it is they're making, while Aizawa-Sensei doesn't move at all besides the movements as he helps Present Mic cook.

Oboro had plopped himself into the chair beside Izuku at some point, regarding him with a thoughtful look. He doesn't say anything, but he does watch. His lips pull in a frown at the apology, but he doesn't say anything either.

Izuku hadn't realized he'd started to slump tiredly in his chair. The to-go cup is curled against his chest, while his other fist supports his head. He doesn't realize until Present Mic turns, mouth pursed as if to ask him something, but instead, his mouth shuts with a soft click of his teeth as a gently, fond look crosses his face.

"Why don't you go put on something comfy, eh, Listener?" He suggests softly, gentle smile never waning. "I washed everything you left on the bed. Your uniforms are hung up in the closet; I ironed them along with some of my shirts. And... I noticed you didn't have many comfy clothes. We love comfy stuff in this household so I found some of our old things that we never use anymore for ya to use. Just until we can get our hands on your stuff, or get you some new clothes. They're on the bed too, you're welcome to do with them as you please, ya'dig?"

The teen gives a light nod, which appears to be all the answer his English teacher needs. The man's smile widens before turning back to the counter, opening a zip lock bag of marinated something.

"Feel free to shower if you want too, Problem Child," Aizawa-Sensei adds without looking up from what he's doing. "Everything from yesterday still applies. We'll get you your own toiletries tomorrow or something. Today was stressful for you, the warm water will help."

"Okay," the teen nods once more, even though his teachers aren't even looking in his direction.

It takes more effort to push himself up than he'd care to admit. Now that he can relax without worry, it's frighteningly easy to. He takes

the last sip of his hot chocolate, wincing at the mouthful of cold, syrupy residue that had sunk to the bottom. Oboro snorts a laugh from his seat at the face Izuku makes, but he doesn't make any move to follow him.

He tosses the cup in the garbage, leaving out the doorway.

There's not a doubt in his mind that they're going to be talking while he's gone. Talking about him. They're married, he gets it. It's not surprising that Aizawa-Sensei would be keeping Present Mic in the loop, and honestly, Izuku doesn't even mind. It's better that Aizawa-Sensei is telling him, rather than Izuku having to do it all over again.

He pads softly down the hall, pushing the ajar guest bedroom door open, where he freezes abruptly.

They're *folded*. Present Mic had folded his clothes.

He's not sure why the thought that his teacher took the time to fold his clothes after washing them shocks him as it does, but it truly does.

It'd been years since anyone other than him had washed his clothes—and truthfully, he's a teenager with a busy, tiring schedule. He'd never had time to sit down and fold his clothes. There always something more pressing he needed to take care of, or homework he needed to have completed.

And, after a long day of classes, and dealing with his bullies, the last thing he wanted to do was fold clothes, so they never really got done.

The stack is neat, everything he currently owns looking smaller now that it's not scattered in a heaping pile. It's a sad amount of clothes. He knows he has a bit more in the duffle bag in his locker—but that bag is mostly filled with personal belongings and items he couldn't bear to part with.

Izuku's gaze slides over from the pile of his own clothes, to the second pile of clothes. None are familiar to him, so these ones must be the clothes Present Mic was talking about. There're old sweatpants, pajama bottoms, tee-shirts and a sweater or two.

He's curious about them.

He unstacks them all, arranging the folded articles along the mattress as he looks through them with a cocked head before deciding on a colourful *Put Your Hands Up* radio merch tee shirt, and a pair of dark

grey pajama pants from the pile.

He digs out another pair of underwear from his backpack under the bed—he'd been far too embarrassed to let his teacher wash those and they had been the only thing he'd *overpacked*. He still had another week's worth of fresh underwear.

He hugs his new clothes to his chest, noting the new scent of a laundry detergent he'd never smelt before. After his mother started leaving more, he'd always gotten the cheapest there was—since his allowance was already spread thin between meal planning. This kind smells very nice; fresh and clean.

The bathroom hasn't changed since last night's shower, but he feels a little more comfortable when it comes to stripping his clothes off and stepping under the stream of steaming water. Aizawa-Sensei had been right—it's like the stress from the day sags out of him as he stands under the water.

He uses that same shampoo from the day before, but decides to use some body wash this time around as well. He still doesn't know who's is who's. The scents of the shampoo and bodywash clash in a weirdly pleasing way.

He doesn't linger too long in the shower, hopping out after all the suds are washed away. It's nice to be clean, and it's even nicer to step into clean clothes too. His clothes hadn't been particularly dirty, but they hadn't *smelt* clean like these ones.

The clothes are a little lose on him, but they're incredibly comfortable. The pajama pants are soft, and the tee shirt is well made instead of the cheap stuff that usually is handed out when it comes to advertising. He likes them—and because he likes them, he manages to push the thought that these were his *Senseis clothes* aside.

A puff of steam follows Izuku when he opens the door. He steps out, almost tripping when Blanket springs up from where he'd been waiting, almost stalking the bathroom door. He hadn't noticed the cat before. The cat doesn't try to enter the bathroom, but he does circle Izuku like he wants to lead him somewhere.

Turns out the cat just wanted to lead him into the guest room, where he leaps up onto the bed and noses his way under the sheets, knocking the stack of laundry over as he goes. Izuku's not sure why the cat needed an audience, but he doesn't question it—simply puts his dirty clothes on the end of the bed before turning back around to join his

teachers in the kitchen.

They're talking quietly, voices hushed as they move around one another with ease. It's fluid, like they're dancing. He'd never seen his homeroom teacher so... relaxed. It's nice.

This time, it's Sensei who notices him first.

"Have a good shower, Kid?"

"Yeah," Izuku give a little smile, "thank you."

"Y'know, Listener," Present Mic hums, opening the rice cooker and stirring the fluffy grains around, "you're very cute, and incredibly respectful, which is *adorable*, but you really don't need to thank us for anything. We're happy to help! Overjoyed you'll be staying here with us! So glad you're—"

"*You're* laying that on pretty thick, 'zashi," Aizawa-Sensei interrupts casually, cutting the other man off. Present Mic squawks a bit, caught off guard before his jaw snaps closed and he pouts. "He's right though, Problem Child. Don't worry about it, alright?"

Izuku hesitates for a second before nodding.

He's not sure he'll be able to stop because he really is thankful. They've been so kind, and already done so much. For the first time in *years* he's having homecooked meals, and he feels safe, and content, and *comfortable*— taken care of in a foreign way that makes him question everything his life had been. Like, come on, *Present Mic* had *folded* his laundry for him after taking the time out of his day to wash it.

How would he not be thankful for that?

He'll try though, because they asked.

Izuku glances to the side where Oboro had been silently observing.

It's weird to see the ghost so quiet, recoiled small and tucked in on himself so he doesn't take up much room. There's a sad feeling that drops like a brick in Izuku's stomach at the thought that this is probably the usual for Oboro. Watching silently and staying out of the way.

It makes his heart hurt, but he knows he can't blame anyone—the

teachers don't know the ghost is there, and it's not like there's a whole lot the ghost can really do, especially when Izuku isn't around.

"Can, uhm," Izuku clears his throat, stepping closer to his teachers when the both turn to look at him, "w-was there anything I... I could help with?"

"You're the sweetest," Present Mic chirps, "sure thing, Listener. Why don't you grab some bowls for us? We're just a couple seconds off!"

Aizawa-Sensei is stood at a small grill placed over the elements on the stovetop, four fillets of unagi grilling. Present Mic is still manning the rice cooker, fingers drumming on the countertop as he waits impatiently.

Izuku does as asked, grabbing four bowls— freezing as he realizes what he'd done. He frowns at the stack, shooting the ghost a sad look before settling that fourth bowl back in the cupboard.

"Hope you like kabayaki, Kiddo." Present Mic laughs as he starts filling each bowl with rice, before holding them out to Sensei, who transfers a fillet of grilled eel on top of each bowl of rice.

Izuku nods energetically in response.

He hovers in the middle of the kitchen for a second as he tries silently to figure out where the chopsticks and cutlery are kept before glancing questioningly at Oboro. The ghost huffs fondly, slipping off the counter like he'd read Izuku's mind, and pauses in front of one of the drawers. "This one."

Izuku smiles gratefully, tugging it open. He finds exactly what he's looking for, pulling out three sets of chopsticks and sets them on the table.

"Did... did you guys want something to drink?" Izuku asks carefully, unsure why he feels so nervous.

"Ooh, good call," Present Mic nods, he's still got his Matcha tea that he'd been sipping on, "how about water? Shota, water?"

The man gives a gruff hum that Izuku thinks means yes, so he grabs three glasses down from the cupboard, glad Blanket is, as far as he's aware, tucked away in the guest room and won't grab his ass while he reaches.

He fills each glass with water, smiling to himself.

His teachers are currently transferring the bowls to the table, dancing along awkwardly as to not step on Fish and Nemo who're circling underfoot at the scent of the eel, despite the sweet-smelling soy sauce marinade. Oboro is trying to lure the cats away with soft calls, but they ignore him; the ghost *pouts*.

Izuku thinks he likes it here.

The day Midoriya Izuku doesn't show up to school, is the day that Bakugou Katsuki swears hell freezes over. He'd known the nerd since they were both in diapers, and not once had the idiot missed class.

He'd come to school sick, and injured. Flushed with fever, and so annoyingly tired that it made him a complete moron. Midoriya Izuku did not miss school. Never had—and Katsuki thought he never would.

Yet, here he was, at school, at *Yuuei*, the damn nerd's dream school, and Deku's nowhere to be seen. He gives the idiot the benefit of the doubt at first.

Sure, Deku arrived early every day, but everyone has days when they wake up late. It had been years since Katsuki beat the nerd to school, so when his lip curls in annoyance when he notices Deku's seat empty, he ignores it.

He waits.

One by one, peers enter the room. None try to talk to him—except that stupid, red-headed extra, who seems to think they're friends. They're not. Still, he gives one word replies whenever the idiot pauses in his rambling. A few more kids joined the conversation, crowding his desk. The electric one, and tape arms.

Katsuki half listened, while ignoring the conversation at the same time. He wasn't interested in it, but still kept an ear in it. He wasn't sure why the extras chose him to crowd—maybe they followed Shitty-Hair or something.

Time ticks on, and the seconds dwindle down until finally the bell rings.

And Deku's not there.

He turns back in his seat to glare at the empty chair behind him. It's weird to see it empty.

"What, you don't miss Midoriya, do ya, Bakugou?" His scowl lifts to Tape Arms, who's smiling smugly one seat back and one seat over from him. For a second, he debates throwing an explosion in the Extra's direction, but decides he doesn't want to be expelled, so he shoots him with a death stare instead.

Earphones beside him snickers. Katsuki's glare snaps to her, but she's undeterred.

"Why would I miss that shitty Deku."

"Where is Midoribro anyways?" Shitty-Hair questions from across the room, eyes flicking to the empty seat with a light frown. "He hasn't missed a day yet, has he?"

"No," Glasses shakes his head matter-o-factly, "Midoriya's attendance thus far has been exemplary. It's rather surprising he's not here. Then again, what's even more curious is the fact that Sensei hasn't arrived yet, nearly a full minute after class has officially begun."

"Yeah," Floaty Girl chimes in with an uncertain look, "that is strange. Aizawa-Sensei is a stickler about time, so it's weird for him to be late..."

"Sensei could be busy with Hero work, or teacher things, kero. But Midoriya... I hope he's alright," Frog Girl shakes her head, "ribbit. He did leave pretty fast yesterday."

"Oh yeah, he did," Shitty-Hair frowns harder. "I forgot about that. What was he muttering about anyways? Does anyone know? He sounded so upset."

"He mutters a lot," Earphones shrugs when everyone glances towards her. She has the best ears of the class, besides maybe the Extra with all the arms. "I tune him out mostly—it's usually about Quirk related stuff, but sometimes he talks to himself. He's hard to understand; he talks fast." That doesn't surprise Katsuki; the nerd has always fanboyed over Quirks because the useless Deku never had his own. Until now. And don't even get him started on Deku's stupid one-sided conversations. "It did sound like he was having an argument with someone though. It was... intense."

"Yeah, we saw," Sparky sighed, leaning back in his chair, "I think

everyone heard him yelling at the end. He sounded *pretty* messed up—I wonder what it was about."

"We should not be gossiping about our classmate in his absence," Glasses tuts, shooting a glance around at everyone. Though not everyone was talking, everyone was listening. Clearly Deku's lack of presence was concerning to everyone.

"What Four-Eyes said," Katsuki spits out, "mind your damn business, Extras. If Shitty-Deku wants to miss his classes, let him fail. Who gives a shit?"

"Harsh," Shitty-Hair huffs out as he slumps down against his desk.

"That is no way to speak about your classmate, Bakugou!" Glasses scolded, pushing his glasses up his face with a stern look. No one seemed to pay him any mind though, attention still focused on Katsuki, who's slumped in his seat in annoyance.

"You really don't care he's absent, Bakugou?" Raccoon Eyes calls from across the room, leaning on her elbow and edging her body in his direction in contemplative interest. "What if he's not okay?"

What if he's not okay? Why the hell would Katsuki care?

He doesn't *care* what Deku does.

"Why would I?" Katsuki snorts indifferently. "Now, will all you idiots shut up about that shitty nerd? He's always been fuckin' weird, forget about it."

"Still," Sparky shrugged, "shouldn't we be a bit worried he's having full on conversations with himself?"

Earphones casted a look to the side at the blonde electric Quirked teen before nodding slowly. "Maybe..." a thoughtful second of silence before she continued, "he was having a full conversation with seemingly no one in the gym..."

No one has a chance to say anything else, because the classroom doors roll open, and everyone's glancing over to see who comes in. It's not Aizawa-Sensei running late though; it's Midnight-Sensei who strolls in.

"Sorry I'm late," the woman apologizes, but there's literally nothing apologetic about her voice. She smiles brightly, scanning over them. "Aizawa's got personal matters to attend to today, so I'm covering for

him. I don't have a lesson plan, so... today's a study period. But I'd also like to remind you all that you'll be picking your hero names at some point soon, so think on that. It'll represent you as a hero, so make it good."

She doesn't say much else, content to lean against Aizawa-Sensei's podium, only glancing up every so often, but even then, she doesn't seem particularly worried about whether or not they're being productive. She's really just adult supervision, Katsuki grits his teeth when he realizes. Of course Aizawa doesn't trust them.

Still, the blonde-haired teen does as told; pulling out the Modern Hero history assignment that's due in a few days. His glance drifts over his shoulder every so often, glaring in irritation at the empty seat. Unbelievable.

Shitty Deku. Missing school. How's the bastard gonna learn if he doesn't show up? How will Deku ever beat him if the useless nerd doesn't step up and *try*.

"Bakugou misses Midoriya," someone around him teases under their breath, but he can't for the life of him recognize *who*, or else he would've lit their desk up in an explosion; consequences be damned. He shoots a vicious look at everyone in the proximity of his seat, gaze lingering briefly on Deku's empty chair before he's turning his glare back onto his work.

"Shut the fuck up," he hisses back under his breath.

He most certainly *does fuckin' not*.

Izuku's worried about school the following day. He's worried about what his friends are going to say, and he's worried he's fallen behind in that one day of missed classes. He's nervous about facing everyone after how he'd left on Monday— and he's also afraid of the questions they're going to ask.

How would he explain himself?

Just because Aizawa-Sensei hadn't asked about why he'd been talking, shouting, alone on the benches, doesn't mean his prying classmates won't. How's he going to excuse that? How much had they heard? Jirou has amazing hearing due to her Quirk, and Shoji can also hear really well depending on what his duplicate arms are doing. He doesn't know how loud he was—maybe *everyone* heard him.

Plus, he's got so much more to explain too—like, why'd he miss his classes? His classmates are a curious group, and he knows he'd be worried if any of his friends left unexpectedly only to not turn up the following day.

There's just so much that had changed in those two days—Monday evening and Tuesday. He lived with their teachers now. Knew more about their teachers than he'd ever admit. Sensei and Present Mic were married, but he'd take that secret to the grave before telling any of his peers. If Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic wanted them to know, they would've told them.

So, yeah, he's a bit anxious for school on Wednesday morning.

He's awoken that morning by a freezing cold chill that settles in his forearm. In response to the surprise cold, the teen lets out a jolting gasp, the sound heavy and completely involuntary, like his body is reacting as if someone had dumped a bucket of ice water over him. He springs up into a sitting position, blankets pooling in his lap as he pants.

"Sorry! Sorry," a voice yelps, "I forgot, oh man, sorry. Just... Sho's coming to wake you up—thought you might, I don't know, want to be up already?"

"Yes," Izuku wheezes, trying to clear the fog from his brain at the abrupt wake up. "'m up, thanks. Jeez that's cold. T-thank you."

"Sorry," the ghost repeats once again, a sheepish look on his face. "I thought maybe—y'know, the touching thing... guess not."

"We need more practice," Izuku huffs out, throwing the blankets off himself. A shiver racks his body, but it's got nothing to do with the ghost. He's just cold. His arms wind around himself, hugging himself tightly.

He jumps in surprise when there's a rapping of knuckles against the door, soft but announcing all the same, followed by a low, "Problem Child? You awake? I'm leaving in an hour, and I assume you'll need a ride in too."

"Y-yes!" Izuku blurts, embarrassment flooding to his cheeks as he drags his palms down them in an attempt to ward off the flush, "thank you, Sensei. I'm awake! I, uh, I-I'll just be a second!"

He doesn't get a response, but he does hear his Sensei's footsteps

receding down the hallway. Alone once again, well, with Oboro at least, the teen sucks in a couple breaths. The ghost looks apologetic, wringing his hands together. He looks like he feels awful about the abrupt wake-up call.

“Don’t worry about it,” Izuku shakes his head when he finally catches his breath, “I’m used to it. Your, uhm, your *chill*. Just... not when I’m asleep, I guess? I’m fine, it was just a surprise.”

“I still feel bad,” Oboro pouts.

Izuku shoots him a light frown, shaking his head as he repeats, “don’t worry about it. Really, it’s cool. I really don’t mind.”

The ghost is still pouting, but he nods slowly.

“You should get dressed,” the ghost shakes his head, turning on his heels and marching towards the door. He pauses, half in the door, looking back. He looks like he wants to say something else, mouth opening before snapping shut like he thinks better of it. Then the ghost leaves through the door.

Izuku stares at where the ghost had just been before finally sliding out of bed. The first thing he does is sort out his backpack. He takes all his underwear out of the pocket, because now that he doesn’t *have* to cart his underwear around, he doesn’t *want* too.

He’d be devastated if his underwear accidentally spilled out across the floor and his peers and teachers saw them. He’d never be able to show his face again—that would be worse than everyone knowing he talked to someone who wasn’t technically there.

...*probably*, at least.

He sorts out everything he needs for his classes, and leaves everything he doesn’t on the desk in the corner of the room. He’ll probably bring his duffle bag back with him tonight— and then he can actually use his locker again.

After his backpack is sorted, lighter than he ever remembers it being, he opens the closet door where he instantly feels soft and fluffy. He’d forgotten Present Mic had ironed his uniforms for him. The wrinkles are gone, and they smell fresh and clean. The fabric sits perfectly on him, probably looking the best it has since that first day of school.

He takes slings his backpack over a shoulder before making his way to

the bathroom, where he takes care of his morning routine—peeing, brushing his teeth and attempting to finger brush through his wily curls (always futile; his hair is absolutely unruly).

He leaves the bathroom feeling more awake, but still completely nervous. He really doesn't want to face his friends, and peers—but on the bright side, at least he doesn't have to face his Sensei.

Speaking of, Izuku finds Aizawa-Sensei sat at the table in the kitchen nursing a mug of coffee. He looks tired, but not as tired as he usually looks.

"Where..." Izuku glances around, clearing his throat before continuing. Aizawa-Sensei's gaze had lifted from his coffee in preparation to Izuku's incoming question. "Where's Present Mic, Sensei?"

"Patrol," the man answers, gaze dropping back to his mug. He takes a swig before continuing. "'zashi has morning patrols on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. They start around five AM, and end just before his first class—your class. He'll also occasionally get a weekend patrol shift, or be called away for missions suited to his Quirk and fighting style, but that's a general rule of thumb for any Pro Hero."

"Oh," Izuku cocks his head. That's pretty cool. "When... uhm, when do you patrol, Sensei?"

The question lingers for just a second before Izuku realizes how stupid it is— "I-I mean, I *know* you're an underground hero, so you obviously patrol a-at night since that's when all the activity is, but, like, w-what times do... do you, uh, patrol?"

And... foot in mouth. Nice Izuku.

Oboro snorts a laugh somewhere behind him, and Izuku doesn't even need to glance over to see the ghost on that little corner of unused counter.

"I took off the next week with stockpiled vacation days," Sensei explains easily as if Izuku hadn't just rambled himself into a wall. The man doesn't even look up, just glares tiredly down into his coffee. "Usually though, my patrols start around ten PM and end somewhere around four AM. Some are longer, and some are shorter depending on the other heroes patrolling any specific night."

The teen nods, that makes sense. He is confused, however, why his teacher was taking time off. This was the same man who'd walked

into class the day after waking up from a head wound induced two-day coma. At least that's what he'd gathered from the ghost who'd kept him in the loop.

"Why'd you take vacation time?" Izuku mumbles after a second to mull over everything his Sensei had just explained.

The man raises an incredulous eyebrow before sighing, "for you, Problem Child. You're still getting settled in, and you're my priority right now. We have a lot we need to accomplish before that two-week check-in deadline if we're going to get the go-ahead for you staying here more permanently."

"Oh," Izuku breathes out again, sounding like a broken record. *Right*. This isn't permanent yet. He's staying here on borrowed time until his social worker deems them fit long-term foster parents, and the apartment a good place for him to be raised.

His teacher gives a deep, huffy hum, but doesn't look up from his coffee. "You need to eat something before school, Problem Child. I can't cook for shit—that's 'zashi's thing. But you're welcome to make yourself something, or there's toast, or a jelly pouch if you'd like. Anything's better than nothing."

"O-okay," Izuku nods, turning towards the counter. It's not hard to locate the bread— but he's a bit confused about the toaster. At home or... back when he lived with his mother, they'd had a pop-up toaster that sat on the counter for convenience. There didn't appear to be one here.

Izuku scans a second time before turning to look at his teacher. Aizawa-Sensei's gaze is still downcast, glaring down into his coffee tiredly. The teen doesn't really know how to inquire about the toaster randomly without seeming like an idiot, but he doesn't have to worry for long because almost as if his teacher can sense his gaze, the man's attention drags up slowly, "did you need something, Problem Child?"

"Uh... where do you keep the, uhm, the toaster, Sensei?"

The man blinks for a second before nodding to himself.

He stands, fingers gripping the rim of his mug. He makes a beeline for the coffee pot first, setting his mug down beside it, before pulling open a cupboard. The cupboard below Oboro's counter spot. The ghost draws his legs up as the teacher rummages around in the cupboard, a frown tugging on his lips at being disturbed.

Izuku steps to the side a bit to see what else is in the cupboard. There are a couple random appliances in it—a blender, an older model of a rice-cooker, an indoor grill, the kettle he'd seen on his first night here, as well as the toaster.

"Anything we don't use often is kept in here," Aizawa-Sensei explains as he pulls the pop-up toaster out setting it on the counter by Izuku, next to the closest electrical outlet. "Hizashi likes having things, even if he doesn't use them often. I personally don't see the appeal, but to each their own."

"Why... do you have two rice cookers?" Izuku can't help but ask as he watches his teacher plug the toaster in for him.

"He's also a hoarder." The man huffs bluntly, lip curling up in the faintest, fondest way. "I asked the same question—apparently we needed a spare in case the newer, better one broke. It seemed illogical to argue with him about it."

Izuku can't help but smile at that.

Finally, with the toaster plugged in and waiting, the teacher stepped out of the way, turning back towards the coffee pot. His teacher didn't pause at all, moving gracefully to fill his mug again. Izuku took that as his que to drop his slices of bread down into the slots, pushing the button that lowered the bread into the toaster.

It wasn't long until Izuku was sat at the table with his teacher-foster-parent, along with his ghost-best-friend. And wasn't that a sentence he'd never ever breathe aloud. He takes a bite of his buttered toast, and Aizawa-Sensei sips silently at his coffee. Oboro's draped himself over the table, finger dragging through Izuku's plate and second piece of toast.

All is quiet, until his plate shifts to the side along with Oboro's finger.

Izuku jerks his attention down—it hadn't moved far, half an inch, maybe even less, but it had scraped along the table as it went. And *Sensei* had heard it too. The man looks towards Izuku, who's hands are nowhere near the plate, one hanging just over the edge of the table and the other holding his slice of toast to his mouth, frozen where he was about to take a bite.

"Um, oops?" the ghost manages out, staring down at the plate in shock. So, that hadn't been intentional.

“What was that?” Aizawa-Sensei raises an eyebrow, head angling down at the plate. Oboro had withdrawn completely, sitting on his hands like a scolded schoolboy.

“U-uh,” Izuku stutters out, trying to come up with an excuse. He doesn’t, of course, how can he come up with a logical excuse when Aizawa-Sensei's eyes are boring into him as he waits for an answer? “W...what was what, Sensei?”

“That’s what you’re going with?” Oboro blinks at his side, and Izuku’s never felt more personally attacked. He gets it, it was a stupid answer, but what else was he supposed to say to a plate moving all by itself? Sensei is *smart* and *attentive*—he wouldn’t be easily fooled.

Ignoring the ghost entirely, and as a panicked attempt to not have to continue speaking, the teen takes a big bite of his toast. It dries his mouth out completely, but it’s worth it because now he can’t answer.

His teacher narrows his eyes, gaze scanning Izuku’s features. He hopes he manages to school his expression, but he’d not sure because Aizawa-Sensei's lips quirk downward in an almost frown.

“Never mind then,” his teacher relents with a heavy sigh. Despite the sigh, he really doesn’t look like he believes Izuku’s words. Maybe it was his hurry to jam toast into his face when shot a questioning look. “But while we’re at it, you can drop the honorifics with us, Problem Child.”

“W-what?” the teen promptly chokes on the mouthful of dry toast. He coughs, fist coming up to pound at his chest as toast crumbs cling to his throat. His coughs don’t really die down, and his body panics at the feeling; eyes watering as a glass is shoved into his hand, another hand on the bottom of the glass urging it up.

Izuku’s not sure when his teacher had moved, or how he was so fast and quiet.

That bite of toast really backfired.

The water washes down his bite of toast, taking the lingering crumbs down too. He chugs the water, hardly aware of the hand on his back rubbing soothing lines that help ease the tension in his muscles.

“That was eventful,” Aizawa-Sensei says at his side when Izuku can finally draw in shaky breaths again; they’re littered with little half coughs and wheezes, but the panic is subsiding gradually.

Izuku sucks in a couple more desperate breaths, finally dropping his hands, glass included, down to his lap. The hand from his back is gone, and he's not even sure if there ever really was one.

"Do you have a habit of choking on toast that we should be aware of, or was it something I said that caused that?"

"Sorry," the teen forces out, wiping the wetness from his eyes. "Just… You really want me to stop calling you Sensei…? But—"

"No," the man cuts Izuku off not unkindly with a shake of his head. He finally eases away from the teen, regarding him thoughtfully, before he reaches for his mug across the table and takes another swig. He finishes off his coffee in that mouthful, staring down at it longingly before turning to set the empty mug in the sink, continuing casually as he does so. "I want you to call us appropriately depending on the situation and where we are. I am your Sensei, and I will be for the next three years, but I'm not your Sensei at home—just like I'm not a regular civilian or a teacher when I'm on patrol."

"What should I call you instead?" Izuku stumbles his way through the question, ignoring Oboro's snickers.

"I don't really care, Kid." The man shrugs. "And neither will Hizashi. Just not Sensei here. Try to separate homelife from school life. You can call me Aizawa, or Shota, whatever's easier for you. And you can call 'zashi Yamada or Hizashi. It's logical. You live here with us. We're not your teachers when we're at home we're… we're your guardians, yeah?"

"So…" Izuku hazards uncertainly, "I call you Eraserhead outside of school when you're in your hero costume, Aizawa-Sensei at school and… and S-Shota at home and the rest of the time then?"

It feels incredibly weird calling his Sensei by his given name. It feels almost like taboo, but it's also something he's sure he'll get used to the more he does it.

The man in question lifts one shoulder in a shrug, "that would be ideal, yes. It really doesn't matter what you call us, just when we're in the presence of others—your peers, or the other teachers, be cautious of the names you're using. I'm not sure I could handle your class of hellions calling me anything but *Sensei*."

Izuku can almost imagine the face of accumulating danger on their teacher if any one of his classmates called the man anything other

than Aizawa-Sensei or Eraserhead. The thought's almost as funny as it is truly terrifying.

Still, Izuku understands the concern. He'd known his peers for over a month now, so he knows that if they heard Izuku calling him anything else, not only would it raise questions, but it would also open a door to them using the names as well. Teenagers were notorious for the 'monkey see, monkey do' thing, and he *really* doesn't want to be the one to start that.

"Uhm, y-yeah," Izuku nods slowly. It's really a fair request. He's not sure he'd want to be called 'Sensei' at his own home if this was reversed. And it's not that weird addressing his teacher so... *informally*. Well, it is, but he'll do it. "Okay. I can do that."

"Good," the man huffs, looking the most pleased Izuku thinks he's ever seen the stone-faced teacher. "Are you going to attempt your toast again, or would you like a jelly pouch for the road?"

The thought of finishing his toast after nearly dying from it is not appealing. "Jelly pouch?"

"A kid after my own heart," his teacher muses without emotion, tugging another cupboard open (it looks like it's filled with snack foods and easy things to eat and make) and pulling two jelly pouches out of it. "This is where I stash them. Help yourself. Now grab your stuff; we're going to be late."

That's how Izuku finds himself riding passenger with his homeroom teacher, *Shota*, on the way to school, while sucking at a jelly pouch that tastes surprisingly good.

They really were almost late. The halls are filled with students milling around, gossiping and waiting for classes to start. It's just a few minutes before the bell, but Izuku knows he can make it into the classroom before it rings. He expects no leeway from his teacher—he wouldn't accept it even if he got it (though he has a feeling Aizawa-Sensei wouldn't play favorites ever, and Izuku's *glad* he doesn't).

He loses his teacher at some point, thankfully.

He doesn't want to walk into class with Aizawa-Sensei on his heels. Sure, they'd arrived together—but it's not like anyone would've seen him getting out of Sensei's car. The teachers had a really cool underground parking garage that only opened for Pro Hero teaching

Licenses. Izuku hadn't even known it existed!

Or... that's what Oboro had explained from the backseat of the car at least. Laughing to himself when he'd caught sight of Izuku staring down in awe at the Yuuei teacher ID card in Sensei's hand.

Izuku's just glad it's the ghost who catches him intently focused on the card instead of the Pro himself.

Izuku makes his way through the crowded halls, hands fisted around the straps of his backpacks as his nerves get the better of him. He feels like it the first day at Yuuei all over again. It's not—he knows what he's doing. He knows his classmates, he knows his teacher, and quite frankly, he's not sure he could have a worse day than that first day.

Still, his heart pounds in his chest and anxiety pulses through his body.

He hesitates outside the door, already hearing the chatter of his classmates preparing for the day.

"You not going in?" Oboro asks at his side, scuffing the toe of his shoe against the floor as he waits. "Sho'll arrive soon, and as much as he likes you... uhm, there won't be any lenience?"

"I know," Izuku huffs. "I don't want lenience. I'm just... it doesn't matter."

The ghost opens his mouth to say something else, but Izuku really doesn't want to hear it. Instead, the teen slides the door open, swallowing anxiously when a hush falls over his classmates. It appears he's the last to arrive—just his seat empty.

"Deku!" Uraraka chirps, launching up from her seat and beelining towards him. "You're back!"

"Yeah," the boy lets out an awkward laugh, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. "I'm back."

"Midoriya," Izuku looks over at Iida, who'd joined them. The engine-Quirked teen chops at the air as he continues on, voice stern and formal, "we were very surprised to see you absent yesterday, but I know an exemplary student like yourself must have a perfectly good explanation for tardiness!"

And there it is.

Everyone is looking over at him now. Some downright staring, while others are glancing over periodically only to look away hurriedly. He feels under observation, and it an awful feeling.

“I…” Izuku can hardly force the word out, unsure how to add anything else. His fingers tap against his thigh as he stands there, eyes flicking around the room but avoiding catching anyone else’s.

What was he supposed to say?

He doesn’t want to talk about and of that. Not about his mom, or his days homeless. Not about his teachers taking him in, or his visit with the police and social services. He doesn’t want to tell them he’s as good as an orphan now—that his mother didn’t like him enough to bother sticking around.

The fear must show on his face because no one in the room mutters a thing. The silence is heavy, almost suffocating for the green-haired teen.

It’s Tsuyu who breaks the silence, preceptive and kind.

“You don’t have to tell us anything, Midoriya,” the frog-Quirked girl croaks softly from her desk. “Ribbit. We just missed you, is all. I’m sure Iida’s not trying to… pressure you, right, Iida?”

“Of course not! I’d do no such thing, Midoriya!” The class rep squawks, before he arches into a tense bow. “Forgive me for my rudeness, we’re all just glad you’re all right! It is none of our concern what goes on in your personal life, we were just worried about your absence!”

“Right,” Uraraka nods with a frown. “It was the weirdest thing, Midoriya. First you didn’t come to class, and then Sensei was out too! We had Midnight-Sensei as our stand-in!”

“Yeah, kero,” Tsuyu agrees, “and then Mic-Sensei was out too. Snipe-Sensei filled in for him, so we really had two study periods.”

“Sensei was out too?” Izuku plays dumb, head cocking to the side. Oboro sniggers behind him, clearly enjoying the insider knowledge that Izuku knows far more than any of his peers do. “Why?”

“Well, we’re not exactly sure,” Kirishima calls from his seat, eyebrows furrowed thoughtfully, “no one would tell us much. Midnight-Sensei just said he was taking personal time. I hope he’s okay. But hey, glad

to see you back, Midoribro! Class just wasn't the same without'cha!"

"Yeah!" Uraraka nods furiously, "it totally wasn't! It was the weirdest day by far. We didn't do like anything interesting, so don't worry, Deku, you didn't miss much!"

The class all mutters in agreement, and a tiny part of Izuku's chest lights up with a faraway feeling of fondness. He'd been gone for one day and they'd missed him. That's a first. He's always amazed by these teens, his classmates. He hadn't really had friends before, but now he has nineteen of them. Or eighteen not counting Kacchan.

Content to leave the conversation there, Izuku steps into the room. He plants himself at his desk, Oboro perching on the edge of it by the wall. No one else says anything, so Izuku focuses on pulling out what he'll need for homeroom.

"Oi. Deku." Izuku's attention jerks up to Kacchan, who is no longer sitting in his own desk, instead stood stiffly by Izuku, shoulders hunched and hands jammed in his pockets. "Here."

The ash-blonde draws one hand from his pocket, holding it out to Izuku. The green-haired teen freezes uncertainly, blinking in surprise as he slowly moves his hand to settle under Kacchan's. His heart speeds up, expecting—well, he doesn't even know *what* he's expecting. An explosion maybe?

Only when Izuku's hand is under Katsuki's does the blonde open his hand, letting something small drop into Izuku's hand. He can feel his classmate's gazes on them, watching. He's also acutely aware of Oboro pressing in far too close, almost protectively.

Kacchan's hand is back in his pocket as soon as the item drops from his grip, and he's glaring at Izuku over his nose, lips pursed in a scowl.

The green-haired teen withdraws his own hand with another cautious blink, only to have his gaze drop onto... is that a Bluetooth earbud? He doesn't even own earbuds—he didn't have the money for them. Never seemed like a necessity. "Kacchan this isn—"

"Can it, Deku." The blonde spits venomously. "You dropped that on Monday before you left class like a bat outta hell. Next time you decide to take your shitty deadbeat dad's call, don't do it in class, got it, ya Shitty Nerd? Keep your daddy issues to yourself, we don't need to hear about it."

And with that, the blonde turns on his heels, takes two steps forwards before dropping into his chair.

“Tch.” Kacchan's glare snaps around the room, barking out his next words with projection so all can hear, “will you stupid fuckin’ Extras mind your own damn business?”

Everyone’s attention jerks away from the two of them.

“That’s... not yours?” Oboro’s chilly breath fans over Izuku’s shoulder as he peers down at the lone earbud still cradled in Izuku’s palm. The green-haired teen’s still blinking down at it too.

His silence must drag on for a second too long because Oboro continues uncertainly, “…right?”

Izuku shakes his head in a silent answer to the statement, hair falling into his eyes at the soft gesture of reply.

“Did... did Bakugou just *cover* for you?” Oboro’s glance is now burning into the back of Kacchan’s head, eyes narrowed with astonishment. Izuku thinks he’d be looking at Kacchan too if he weren’t busy staring down at the earbud.

He lifts his shoulder in a faint shrug, one that could easily be passed off as a deep inhale.

And that’s the question, isn’t it? Izuku knows for certain this earbud isn’t his—in fact, he’s like ninety-eight percent sure this is Kacchan’s actual personal earbud. It’s a nice brand, and definitely loved. One half of the pair Izuku has seen the explosive teen using all the time.

Plus, if anyone knew Izuku hasn’t talked to his dad in *years*, it’s Kacchan. Izuku literally hasn’t had any contact with his dad since the man hopped on that flight to the United States. Kacchan had still mostly been his friend at that point—Izuku remembers spending a lot of nights over at Kacchan’s place while his mother sorted herself out.

But Kacchan is really too smart to make this kind of mistake. He knows Izuku too well, even if the years have separated them; despite them growing up as polar opposites in every single way. He’d known Izuku better than anyone at one point. Just like Izuku had known him, and he knows this isn’t some mistake.

The teens hand curls around the earbud, jamming it into the pocket on his backpack. He’ll return it later, when the class isn’t around to

watch.

Izuku can't help but wonder why Kacchan would do this.

Kacchan doesn't like him.

The last time the two of them had an actual, civil conversation had been days before Izuku had revealed his Quirklessness to his once friend.

Why now?

What had changed?

Why was Kacchan being nice in his own standoffish way?

"That may be... I don't want to say *nice*, but almost nice—" Oboro huffs out, arms crossing over his chest as his glare hardens on Kacchan's slouching form, "but I still think he's a bastard."

Izuku lets out a light huff of humor. He can't argue that.

His thoughts are interrupted by Aizawa-Sensei rolling the door open exactly as the school bell rings, face a twist of exhaustion and annoyance already. "I hope you all enjoyed your day of relaxation yesterday. It won't happen again; you need to all be conscious of the fact that your fight is far from over."

There's a murmur that sweeps over the students as their teacher makes his way to the podium without so much as a glance in their direction. Izuku tenses up—their fight? What fight? What was going on?

"The Yuuei Sports Festival is about to start."

The morning plays out how it usually does after their teacher springs the Yuuei Sports Festival on them like he was commenting on the weather. Nothing really changes, and he's thankful for that. Neither Aizawa-Sensei nor Present Mic treat him any differently than before, and Izuku returns the favor.

His classmates don't question him any further, and no one says anything about Kacchan. Kacchan mutters not another word to Izuku; doesn't even glance in his direction all morning.

Truthfully, Izuku is still reeling from the fact his childhood friend

covered for him.

Izuku had been terrified of how he was going to play that off. He didn't know what his classmates had heard, but he'd obviously been arguing with someone. As far as they could see, he'd been talking to himself. And that's concerning to people.

Kacchan had been clever in his ruse—offering up the earbud, easily hidden in one's ear, as well as using the play that Izuku was on call with his father. Izuku is completely indifferent when it comes to his, as Kacchan had said, deadbeat dad. He didn't care if his classmates knew his dad was an asshole because he *was*. Who leaves their kid over something they can't change?

He still doesn't know why his childhood friend would go the length for him.

It's confusing.

Before the teen knows it, lunch time has arrived. Oboro had hung back with Hizashi like usual, and he hadn't been waiting outside Izuku's last period before lunch break. Though they spent most lunch periods together, he knew the ghost sometimes had other things to be doing.

When the ghost wasn't around, Izuku usually fell back onto plans of joining his living friends in the cafeteria—he hadn't outright said it, but Iida, Tsuyu and Uraraka are always thrilled when he joined them at their lunch table whenever he finds the time.

He really should spend more time with them—but to be fair he'd had a lot on his plate the past couple weeks.

He's just lingering behind in class now. All his peers had been quick to stand and leave after being dismissed, but Izuku stuck around to ask Midnight-Sensei if he'd missed anything in his absence the day before. He hadn't, and she shoots him a knowing look that he's not entirely sure what to do with.

He'd gotten a lot of those from all his teachers except Sensei and Present Mic.

Did they all know? It wouldn't be too surprising if his teachers had a general understanding of the situation, but that didn't mean it didn't fill the teen with a sense of dread.

Maybe he'd ask Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic tonight.

Izuku leaves the classroom with a light frown tugging at his lips, only to freeze when he sees All Might's bulking form stood there, waiting. All Might holds a bento box pinched between a couple of his fingers, grinning brightly when he catches sight of Izuku's stalled form.

"A-All Might?" Izuku blinks, "what are... what are you doing here?"

"I am here," the hero grins, "Young Midoriya, would you care to join me for lunch?"

"Lunch?" the teen repeats. It's not the first lunch they'd spent together. They're not consistent in any way. All Might is busy, and between his friends, his ghost and general school work, he doesn't usually have time to join the Pro Hero. Plus, he doesn't like to have lunch with All Might when Oboro's hanging out too. The distaste the ghost has for the Hero is distracting.

"Of course!" The Pro booms energetically as if he's not starting to steam where he's standing. The Pro shifts, smiling waning the slightest in exhaustion. "We have much to speak about, my boy!"

We have much to speak about.

Oh no.

Chapter End Notes

I genuinely feel like Bakugou just has no idea how to be a friend. I'm not sure how his character came out in this fic (because honestly he's hard to write??), but I wanted to include Bakugou trying to be a friend because he has been in counselling with HoundDog for a few weeks at this point in the book, and I feel like he's finally starting to realizing what he'd been doing, what he was taught, was wrong. The school system definitely fucked both Izuku and Bakugou up. Bakugou who could do no wrong, and Izuku who did all wrong simply going off their Quirk statuses.

The tiny changes I'm making of course won't change his brash attitude and mannerisms, because that's what makes him him, but I'll probably be making him a bit nicer in his own Bakugou sorta way. It definitely won't affect the plot of the anime much because the rivalry is a big part of their developments!

Anyways! Thanks for reading, and big thanks for all the attention and support you guys have been giving this! It makes me so incredibly happy to know ya'll are loving reading this as much as I'm loving writing it <3 As always, comments are very much appreciated! Thanks again!

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! I am back again!

Still very much loving writing this fic, and I'm not gonna lie and say I didn't completely lose focus on this chapter. I was just having some fun! I'd planned to start the Sports Festival, but I haven't been motivated to watch anything, let alone a rerun for scene purposes, so that'll be the next chapter! I also added the slow burn tag because, well, this is pretty slow burn.

Anywho! Onto the chapter! I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He really should've seen this coming.

He'd practically seen the cogs in the detective's head turning as soon as he'd figured out who Izuku was. Detective Tsukauchi was All Might's friend. They were close—the man knew of All Might's time limit. As far as he knew, very few people did. He thinks the man might even know about One for All, which is surprising considering how intent All Might was that no one finds out about the Quirk.

Of course, the detective would tell the Pro Hero that his mentee had shown up at the station with his homeroom teacher, abandoned, after living on the streets for three days between classes, practically an orphan who'd been taken in by said teacher.

That's not exactly the kind of thing adults would keep a secret, even if Izuku was desperate for it to be.

Still, a shard of betrayal stabs in Izuku's gut.

Of course, he understands. He knows why he'd done it. Why the Detective had turned around and told All Might; they're friends—close friends—he'd told his friend because his friend is close with Izuku, but still, it wasn't the Detective's to share. It wasn't All Might's right to know.

If Izuku wanted to tell All Might, he would've.

Rationally, he knows it's not that much different than Shota telling

Hizashi, but at the same time, his teacher had made sure Izuku had most of the say. He remembers the questioning look his teacher had sent Izuku before passing over the note his mother had left to the other teacher.

And they'd been so careful and cautious, making sure Izuku felt safe, offering for him to just talk to Aizawa-Sensei. Giving him a *choice*. He'd had choices—he was forced into anything. He wasn't forced to tell anyone. He got to say who was a part of the conversation, and who wasn't.

And given the option, he hadn't minded his English teacher sitting in too.

But he'd been given the option to *decide*.

The detective hadn't given him any option.

And now the number-one Pro Hero was upset with him.

Izuku follows silently behind All Might, being led first into the teacher's lounge, and then into one of those sound proof conference rooms. It's not the one he and Aizawa-Sensei had talked in, but it's basically the same.

None of the teachers batted an eyelash at Izuku trailing along behind All Might, and thankfully Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic were nowhere to be seen.

All Might's form fades away with tendrils of steam coming off him when the door closes behind him. Blood seeps from his mouth, but Izuku is pretty used to that now. The Pro doesn't seem bothered either, just wipes it away before gesturing to the couches without a word.

Izuku sits cautiously, distracting himself with digging around in his backpack.

He's thankful for the bento lunch Shota had pressed into his hands just before leaving that morning, a quiet explanation that Hizashi had packed dinner leftovers for him to take. The thought made him feel soft inside, and he was excited to dig into the food for a second time. It was so good. It gave LunchRush's food a run for its money, and that was high praise.

All Might sets his own lunch down on the table, while Izuku balances

his own in his lap.

The Pro doesn't say anything for a moment. A long moment.

It's different than his conversation with Aizawa-Sensei. All Might isn't waiting for Izuku to lead the conversation; he's not handing over sole control of where the conversation goes—he really just doesn't know how to start it. The differences in teaching, and knowledge of teenagers is blatantly obvious.

Izuku decides, after another lingering second of silence where All Might doesn't know what to say, to give the man some mercy, not looking up from where he's tearing bits of kabayaki apart with his chopsticks, "the Detective told you, didn't he?"

"Yeah..." the Pro finally speaks, voice dry and uncertain. "Yeah, Kid... he did. But I needed to know—"

"He shouldn't have," Izuku can't help but mutter, hardly even away of the fact he'd cut the Number One Hero, *All Might*, off. He's too focused on the stabbing feeling of betrayal fluttering in his chest. "And no, you didn't."

A small, petty part of him wants to tell Aizawa-Sensei that the detective had told someone else about his situation, but that was a can of worms Izuku would be stupid to open. It would probably do more bad than good.

Izuku's quiet for a second before he's glaring up at the Pro; All Might almost shrinks in on himself when he meets Izuku's gaze, "I told the detective of my situation in confidence, and he told someone else without my knowledge. That's not allowed. He shouldn't have done that, even if it was you he was telling."

"No, ah," the man shakes his head guiltily, wringing his fingers together in a very *un*-All Might way. "He probably shouldn't have. You're right. I'm sorry, my boy. He just... he knew I was worried about you. We all were—you were... you were different, Kid."

There's a pause, a second drags on. Izuku's trying to formulate a response when All Might breaks the silence tersely, "I did."

The words were huffed out sharply by the Pro. For a second, Izuku is confused, but then the guilt in All Might's expression is flickering out, replaced with a sharp sternness. Izuku doesn't have time to question it though, as the Pro Hero's mouth curls downward, eyebrows furrowing

as his eyes narrow slightly, “I *did* need to know, my boy—”

“No,” Izuku grits out, overcome by a burst of... *anger*. He’d never felt this angry at All Might before. The emotion twisted in his stomach like a dagger, it felt wrong being this angry. Being this angry at his *idol*. “You *didn’t*. It wasn’t... it wasn’t your concern. It had— it was nothing to do with One for All so— so it had nothing to do with *you*.”

“It had everything to do with me,” the Pro’s eyebrows furrow, the frown deepening. “I was worried, and you weren’t telling me anything. You were... you were avoiding me. You were getting sloppy in your classes, and I could see how tired you were getting. You peers were worried, and your teachers were worried. Your grades were slipping, my boy.”

The flash of anger fades away to exhaustion. Izuku slumps back slightly in his seat eyes scanning the Pro silently.

All Might drags his fingers through his hair stressfully, gaze settling on Izuku and features pinching in confusion and a bit of offense, “I’m your teacher as much as I am your mentor. I care about you. I could’ve helped you. Why... why didn’t you come to me? Why didn't you tell me—”

For a brief second, Izuku wants to snap a reply of: *‘yeah, well, none of my other teachers who care about me enlisted a lie detector cop to feed them personal details of a situation they have no business being a part of!’*

“I didn’t want you to know,” the boy goes with instead, capping the flames of anger down. Getting angry won’t help anyone. Being snappy and riling the Pro up won’t help either. He doesn’t want to fight with All Might. He’s not sure he can handle it.

The teen ducks his gaze, pressing a bite of eel and rice into his mouth.

When he looks up again, he’s surprised to see the shock on All Might’s face. Izuku’s not sure why the look makes his heart drop into his stomach. He’d never really seen something like that on All Might’s face—never so *strong*. The surprise is strong and present, but under that, hidden in his eyes, is uncertainty, and heartbreak.

“What? Why—” the man’s voice is tight, and he seems to realize it too, because he cuts himself off. He takes a breath, blowing out slowly before trying again, “why not, my boy?”

Why not?

Izuku cocks his head. The answer is obvious.

“Because you’re you.”

And it’s true.

Not only does he not want to burden the Number One Pro Hero with his problems, he’d never do that to begin with. His problems weren’t important. Not enough to seek out All Might’s help.

Plus, All Might is busy.

All Might has the world on his shoulders already. Izuku doesn’t want to add anymore onto his plate—as awful as it is to think, if All Might doesn’t have the time to talk about Quirk stuff, to help him learn this powerful, potentially deadly Quirk, why would he have time to care about Izuku’s homelife?

And again, it’s really not the Pro’s business.

It’s Izuku’s.

Besides, he hadn’t wanted to tell *anyone*— frankly, if Oboro hadn’t lured his homeroom teacher in with ghost voodoo or whatever he’d done, Izuku would probably still be sleeping on the streets, struggling to survive.

His eyebrow arches as All Might chokes on blood at the admission, some spurting out into his hands. He barely manages to catch the mess of red, eyes staring at Izuku is a surprised, uncertain type of way. The teen fiddles with his chopsticks, frowning with himself as he continues softly, “you’re you, All Might. Why would I... I had it handled. I didn’t want *anyone* to know. I was doing fine, I—”

“You were living on the streets,” the man reminds breathily after composing himself. His voice remains low and careful, but there’s an edge to it that Izuku wants to duck away from. All Might’s eyes track Izuku’s own clumsy chopstick movements as he fists at his chin and the corners of his mouth, most of the blood wiping away. “Your mother left, my boy. That’s- that’s—”

“That sucks,” Izuku fills in softly, indifferently, despite the pit of guilt and sadness in his own stomach as he pushes rice around his bento container. “I know. But it’s... it’s not the end of the world. I barely even noticed—she's been distant for weeks; months even.”

“Months?” The stuttered way the man breathes the word out had Izuku looking up, eyebrows knitting in confusion. All the fight, the flaring hostility that had clouded the Pro’s gaze, fades away to a deep look of despair. The Pro looks deep in thought, and if by the way his features twist before melting into worry, it’s not nice thoughts.

Izuku doesn’t try to speak again, not when the Pro looks so *wrecked* by something.

“My boy…” Toshinori asks slowly, carefully. He draws the word out uncertainly, like he’s afraid to continue or… or afraid of an *answer*. “Did your mother leave because of One for All?”

He’s really not expecting that. He doesn’t know where the Pro got that idea from.

His mother doesn’t even *know* about One for All. Not as far as Izuku knows at least. She’d never asked, and he hadn’t seen her to tell her he’d magically manifested a Quirk on the day he’d competed in the Entrance Exam. As far as she knows, from what he knows at least, he’d gotten into Yuuei completely Quirkless, because that’s what he’d always been. Quirkless.

He’s not even sure she would’ve stayed if he had manifested a Quirk earlier. It wasn’t the Quirklessness that drove *her* away, not like it had his father. It was Izuku who’d chased his own mother away. His gift of seeing ghost—the fear of her child being different. Being *weird*.

Ironically, it was the Quirk he’d had all along; that no one had known he had because his body wasn’t *biologically equipped* to handle any Quirks (according to Izuku’s pediatrician, who quite possibly could’ve been a Quack like Oboro had huffed weeks prior), that had chased away the ones who were supposed to love him unconditionally.

Who would’ve thought his unique gift that he’d had since he was born was the Quirk his parents had desperately wished he’d manifest.

Izuku opens his mouth after a long second, thinks about what to say, comes up short and closes his mouth again. He does it a second time before clearing his throat and swallowing to calm his nerves, “why… why would you think that?”

The Pro blinks at him, shifts where he’s sitting before leaning back against the backrest of the couch in exhaustion, “Naomasa said… you lied about why your mother left. He didn’t press it because Aizawa was there as well. I know Aizawa doesn’t… that he’s unaware of this;

me mentoring you, and about One for All. Naomasa mentioned Aizawa was... concerned that we were together after the USJ incident. He assumed you lied because you didn't want Aizawa to know."

All Might thought his mother left because he got One for All.

And honestly, that's a perfect excuse. *'Yeah,'* he could say solemnly, *'it was too much for her. All the power I suddenly had, having to watch me get hurt all the time. I guess it... I guess it drove her away.'*

It would be so easy. All Might had just hand fed him the answer to his problems. He'd given him an out. Made up an excuse for him. It would be *easy*.

But he *can't*.

He can hardly bear the look the Pro hero is trying to keep neutral. The deep-seated guilt clouding his eyes at the thought that something he handed over had unintentionally orphaned a young boy.

He loved All Might. He adored the man; looked up to him, and had for the majority of his life.

He couldn't put that on him, because it just wasn't true. He refused, even if it was the easy way out.

"No," Izuku shakes his head lightly, picking at his food now. He's not sure how to continue—he doesn't want to tell anyone. It was still weird. It was still the reason his mother had left, why he'd always been made fun of. His natural Quirk was a secret for a reason, and if he couldn't keep his own secret, what hope did he have keeping One for All a secret? "It wasn't... no. She didn't even know about One for All, it's... well. I'm sorry, I just... I don't want too—"

"You... you don't have to tell me why she left then," the Pro comes to his rescue, voice small. He looks like he really wants to know— wants an answer— but Izuku choses to focus on his words instead of his pleading face. "My boy, I know this is... a personal matter. I see that now... And I see now that just because I was worried for you, it gave me no right to act on it as I did. As Naomasa did. What we did... it was unprofessional and wrong."

There's a pause, but Izuku doesn't look up from his food. He'd more or less just mixed pieces of crumbled up eel into the rice at this point instead of eating it, but he's not even really hungry right now.

Stressed.

He was stressed.

This was stressful.

The hero draws in a slow breath before continuing. "This wasn't the right way to go about my worry for you as my student both within Yuuei, as well as regarding One for All. This was *wrong*; *I* was wrong. Naomasa telling me something so personal about you without your consent was wrong... it was an abuse of my power as the Number One Hero, and an abuse of my friendship with the Detective, as well as an abuse of Naomasa's position. And for that, I apologize."

Izuku's gaze slowly crawls up from the bento in his lap to the Pro Hero. All Might's head is bowed forwards, tone genuinely apologetic and guilty. He really doesn't like All Might's tone dropping like this—especially not for him, but he can't lie and say it isn't nice to get an apology.

It was wrong. It was probably against some laws too that the detective had told All Might something so personal about a minor's personal situation. He was supposed to be able to trust the police, but he didn't know if he could. It was wrong; what they'd done.

He gets it. The worry All Might must've been battling. Izuku knows he'd been withdrawn, but he'd had a lot on his plate. It wasn't just All Might he'd pushed away, it was everyone. Still, he really had abused his status as Izuku's mentor, as well as the Detective abusing his position within the force.

'*It's okay.*' Izuku wants to tell the Pro. He wants this to be over. He wants to brush this under the rug—be done with it. He wants so badly for this to all just... go away.

But... it's *not*. It wasn't okay. He wasn't okay.

"It's not okay," the teen breaths out without lifting his eyes from his chopsticks. "I'm upset, and I feel like you went behind my back. You... you had *no right* to do that—if I wanted you to know I-I would've told you. And... what happened at the police station was private, that Detective had n-no right to tell you, friends or not. I'm... I'm angry, All Might. I'm mad at you."

"As you should be," the Pro winces. His hands interlock together, falling into his lap like a scolded school boy awaiting punishment

outside the principal's office. "I truly am sorry, Kid. We were wrong. I was wrong. I broke your trust in me and... and Naomasa did as well. That's unforgivable."

The deeply apologetic tone stirs up feelings in Izuku's stomach. If he wasn't not hungry before, he certainly wasn't now. Deciding to stop playing with his food, the teen silently closes the bento container, sucking the ends of his chopsticks to clean the rice clinging to them before shoving both back into his backpack.

He doesn't say anything else for a long second, and neither does All Might.

"It's not broken," the teen mutters after a deep, exhausted sigh. He's drained. He's just so done with everything being about him—about everyone snooping in his business. The boy drops his gaze down to his backpack clutched in his hands, "just... bent. I trust you; I just hate what you did. It wasn't cool."

He's not sure anything All Might could do would completely shatter his trust in the Pro Hero. He'd looked up to him for too long. He'd adored the man for too long. All Might did so much good—maybe he wasn't good at this, but he was *good*.

"As do I," the man shakes his head, "I wasn't thinking, young Midoriya. I was... I forgot my place in your life—you don't rely on me like I relied on my mentors. It won't happen again; that I assure you. I just... I want to be someone you can come to when you need help. I don't want to going through this alone. I never... I was never alone with One for All. I always had a mentor around, and friends who stuck close. It pains me to know you were alone on the street for three nights."

"I wasn't alone; I... I had Sensei," the boy whispers out, only after he'd said it realizing how rude it sounds to the man attempting to be that someone for him. It was true, but it did come off as *rude*. "He found me by some... some stroke of *luck* and he... and he helped me. He's the only reason that I went to the police. I owe him a lot."

That didn't help much.

He opens his mouth to apologize, only to freeze when All Might lets out a low laugh. It's not happy, or humorous, but it's also not a sad laugh. It falls somewhere between defeated and appreciative.

Izuku's eyes shoot up to meet All Might's at the sound of the breathy

laughter, but the Pro Hero's gaze is locked down on his untouched bento box.

"I suppose so," All Might's soft laugh slows, but the small smile on his face doesn't waver, "Aizawa's a good one to have in your corner. I'm glad you weren't alone, Kid. Even if you don't put your faith in me... put it into someone, alright? The world's a lonely place when you do everything alone."

Izuku hadn't cried the whole time.

He'd been close at times—talking about his mom, seeing the Pro Hero succumb to guilt that wasn't *entirely* warranted. He'd wanted to cry through his anger and the flurry of betrayal, but he hadn't.

The words hit something deep in Izuku though. He'd noticed. He'd been miserable by himself, terrified. He's not sure what he would've done if Oboro hadn't led his teacher to him. Where would he be now, just a couple days later had Oboro not forced Izuku to take action?

The tears slip down his face before he even knows they're welling. He doesn't quite hear the Pro force out a breath, nor hear the man stand and round the coffee table.

"I'm sorry, my boy," the Hero whispers, "I didn't mean too—"

Izuku jolts up to wrap around the Pro, pressing his cheek against All Might's chest. For half a second the Pro doesn't move, and then he's returning the embrace just as feircly.

It's not the first time Izuku had hugged All Might, and man, was that not a thought that would've made five-year-old Izuku pass out in excitement. All Might, despite the skinny frame, was a very good hugger. He wrapped tightly around Izuku, one arm pressing against his back, while the other knotted through his hair, cradling his head.

Izuku made sure not to squeeze too hard around where All Might had been wounded all those years ago, but he did melt into the touch. Hugs were scarce in his life—especially hugs from adults.

He manages to contain the sobs threatening to bubble up, sniffling into the man's pooling suit jacket and button-up shirt. All Might is silent above him, but his grip doesn't waver until Izuku starts to pull back.

"Thank you," the teenager bows his head slightly, "for being worried

and thinking about me. I'm okay. I appreciate everything you've done, and that you're doing for me."

All Might's voice comes out misty, even after clearing his throat. The Pro drops down to sit on the edge of the coffee table, one hand settling on Izuku's knee as his eyes shine with determination, "anytime, my boy. You remember that."

Izuku nods quickly, reaching up to palm away the lingering tears in his eyes and clinging to his own cheeks. He hopes he doesn't look like he'd been crying—class was about to start again soon.

"You should—" the man clears his throat again, an emotional undertone still clinging despite his efforts, "you should probably head out soon. Your next lessons are about to start and we both now Aizawa doesn't stand for tardiness."

"Yeah," Izuku sniffles, shooting the Pro a tiny, honest smile. He wipes at his eyes one more time for good measure, wincing at the irritation that he was sure was bright red now from both crying and roughly trying to dry his tears.

He's still upset, rightfully so, but he feels better about the situation. The apology had helped, and even though it had taken All Might a little while to realize what he'd done was unsavory, he *had* come to the right conclusion in the end, and that's what really matters. Izuku wholeheartedly believes the Pro will keep his word when it comes to not overstepping.

Izuku stands, pulls his backpack on as he ducks his head in a nod before moving towards the door. All Might is on his heels, carrying his own untouched lunch.

The teen pulls the door open, takes exactly one step out where he freezes.

The teacher's lounge is empty—well, besides one person. Said one person's eyes drift over at the opening if the door from where they're sitting at their desk.

"H-hi, Mic-Sensei..." Izuku breathes out with a crooked smile.

Oof, *busted.*

Even behind Present Mic's tinted glasses, he can see the man's eyes widen a fraction in surprise, body jolting up in concern. He must look

a lot more like he'd been crying than he thought he did. Or, maybe his face was just all red—a mixture of strong emotions and the fact he'd cried. The voice-hero's eyebrows knit together as he moves to stand, a question on his lips that dies out unexpectedly.

Mic's eyes swiftly trail up Izuku and land over his shoulder. Izuku can feel the Number One Hero there, and the boy is sure he winces, not that either teacher is looking at him to notice. It's not exactly a secret that he and All Might are kinda close—but they'd never really been caught sneaking around—well, not that they were really sneaking around just—

"Ah, Yamada!" All Might greets, slipping out past Izuku. He'd forgotten for a second that All Might was in his weakened form and could squeeze through. "Good afternoon."

"All Might," Present Mic greets in reply, scanning the man with a frown before his gaze shifts back over to Izuku. The teen pretends the way his teacher's expression softens doesn't make him feel soft and content, instead scuffing the toe of his sneaker against the floor and stepping more into the room. "Listener, what's up? You... okay?"

"Oh, uh," Izuku swallows, "yes, I'm f-fine, and uhm, n-nothing we, uhm, we just... were..."

"Young Midoriya and I were talking about some extra credit to boost his grade." All Might fills in with a cheerful smile, strutting to his desk where he deposits the bento. "They slipped a little recently, and we all know that just won't do in this course. We've figured it all out, right, my boy?"

"Y-yep!" Izuku yelps, internally wincing. Even he knew *that* wasn't convincing. He shakes his head to himself before looking back up at his English teacher. "It's all sorted out now. I'm feeling... better."

Present Mic eyes him, frown deepening before he glances over at where All Might is shifting. His gaze returns to Izuku, the confusion knitting his eyebrows together deepening, "you've been crying, Listener..."

"Yeah, a bit." Izuku gives a watery laugh, wiping his eyes once again. It's not like he can deny it—Present Mic had seen him crying before. "I'm alright though. I was just... nervous? I really don't like my grades being so low..."

"Uh-huh," the voice-hero gives a slow, not entirely believing nod.

“Sure... Of course. Glad you’re getting some help, Kiddo.”

There’s a sinking feeling in his chest that this is going to get back to Aizawa. Actually, he knows this is going to make its way to his homeroom teacher— Sensei and Mic are married. Even if Mic doesn’t tell Aizawa at school, he’ll probably tell him at home. They don’t seem the type to keep secrets from each other.

Izuku’s kind of dreading Aizawa-Sensei finding out about the One for All meetings he has with the Number One Pro Hero. He’s sure the man already has his suspicions, but *this*? This’ll only add fuel to the fire. All Might and Izuku coming out of a private meeting, where Izuku had been crying. *Yikes*. That doesn’t look good for the Number One Hero; especially considering he’s already not Aizawa-Sensei's favorite person.

“W-well,” Izuku clears his throat awkwardly. His teachers seem to be having a conversation with their eyes. All Might is going to be taking some heat definitely, but Izuku *definitely* doesn’t want to hang around and watch. “Class will be, y’know, starting soon so... I uhm,” he gestures to the door at his side.

“Right,” Present Mic nods, dragging his attention from All Might and onto Izuku. He gives him a light smile, but something in his eyes tells Izuku that this probably isn’t over with him either. *Double yikes*. “You have a good rest of your day, Kiddo, ya’dig?”

“You too!” the teen blurts, hand pressed against the door. His fingers tense to push the door open, and he’s using every ounce of his self-control not to activate One for All in an antsy attempt to get out, “uhm, you as well, All Might-Sensei!”

He doesn’t wait around for a response, slipping out the door quickly.

“What were you doing talking extra credit without Aizawa?” Izuku hears Present Mic ask as the door shuts behind him. His voice is probably the hardest Izuku’s ever heard.

“I was simply offering the boy some help. I was unaware I needed to run that past Aizawa—”

“He was *crying*.” Mic’s tone was as sharp as a dagger, silencing the Number One Pro with ease. “What the hell did you say to him to—”

The door shuts, cutting the conversation off from his ears.

Probably for the best.

Oboro was right, Present Mic was someone you did not want to get on their bad side. And Izuku thought Aizawa-Sensei could be scary. Yeesh.

The next few days are hectic at best. School doesn't really change, despite the heavy gravity that the Sports Festival is just around the corner. Izuku's seen the way his peers are pushing themself to get just that little bit better before being shoved under a spotlight with spectators watching and observing like they're a group of show ponies.

Everyone wants to be the best, and that shows in the effort they're putting in when it comes to training.

This, the festival, has the potential to open so many doors for them; so, they all know they need to be good. There will definitely be scouts —and though they're there mostly for the second and third-year students, it's the first real chance the first years have at getting their Quirks noticed and scouted too.

Izuku is no different than the rest of his classmates, using everything he'd learned thus far— between his Hero Course classes, and those few personal Quirk training sessions with Sensei they'd managed to have— to his full advantage. He's still got miles to go, but he's sure he can get himself noticed. He's excited for the festival, just as much as he is terrified. But it's a good terrified, he thinks.

Izuku wishes he'd had more time to practice using One for All, but his time had been spread fairly thin. As much as he'd love for the upcoming Sports Festival to be the only thing on his mind, his new homelife, the one with his teachers, has been busy.

Wednesday after school, they'd gone shopping; just like Shota had promised the night prior.

Izuku had thought they were just going to get toiletries—his own shampoo and deodorant. That's all he'd planned to buy anyways. It was all he'd ever really needed and spent the money on. Plus, he was sure he could afford it with what little money he had left over from his shifts at the café.

That was not what happened.

Hizashi was the one to announce with an excited grin that they were heading to the mall when he saw Izuku at the end of the day. The teen had dutifully followed behind his homeroom Sensei to the door the lead to the secret underground parking garage, which was where the voice-hero was waiting.

Shota had frowned heavily at the news, scanning his ID card to grant them access with a sigh. Izuku's lips tugged into an uncertain frown at his teacher's reaction, mouth opening to tell them he didn't need to go shopping, but Hizashi was quick to correct him.

"He hates shopping," the blonde had muttered solemnly, patting Izuku's shoulder as if sensing his unease. "To people-y for him, so don't mind his grumpy-pants attitude, Listener."

"Grumpy-pants?" Shota had scoffed, "clever, 'zashi. I'm so offended."

"Shush," the blonde pouts as the three of the got into the car.

Oboro, who Izuku had wondered where he was, was already reclined back in the backseat of the car, eyes shut but they flickered open when Izuku settled beside him. "Ha, you're in the backseat too. Share the pain, my friend."

"Me shush?" Shota huffed with a roll of his eyes, "you're the one calling me names."

"You know I only do it outta love," Hizashi sighed happily, grinning to the right where Shota was settling into the passenger's seat, "my darling."

"Gross," Shota scoffed once more, though his cheeks tinted slightly with colour and he's turning his head to the side to stare out the window.

"*Gross*," Oboro echoed, a mixture of exasperation, fondness and actual half-hearted disgust in his expression. Izuku almost wants to laugh at the way the ghost's face has pinched up like the affection had physically offended him. When the ghost continues, his voice is filled with fondness, curled in a teasing way, "I'm sorry you have to hear this, Izu. I wish *I* didn't have to hear this."

Izuku doesn't say anything but he does let a light smile grace his lips. He doesn't think it's gross—*weird*, a bit—but not gross. It's actually almost... cute. In a weird, *these are my teachers* kinda way.

He feels special that this is a side of them that he gets to see—that they don't mind showing him. These people aren't Present Mic and Aizawa-Sensei, despite the costumes they're still wearing. These two are his two new foster parents, Shota and Hizashi. They don't change much varying from school and homelife, but there are little things—like the affection.

"Heyyyy! Don't call my *love* gross!" Hizashi huffed playfully. "You're so mean, Sho. And in front of our sweet, innocent little Listener too. The nerve."

Izuku actually laughs at that, ducking his head. He thinks he feels both his teachers glance back at him, but he doesn't dare look up from where his curls have curtained his eyes. He's sure they can see his smile though. Shota huffs tiredly, and Hizashi returns a light laugh, hand snaking over to pat Shota's knee.

They stop by the apartment to change out of their uniforms—Hizashi rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck while he explains that people tend to flock when known Pros make appearances in their costumes. Thankfully, he's hardly recognizable out of costume with his hair down and regular framed glasses, and Shota is... well, never recognized to begin with.

Izuku hadn't even been able to place him until seeing him use his Quirk that first day, and none of his peers had connected the dots until after Izuku had muttered their teacher's Hero name, and even *then*, some of them didn't know who Eraserhead was.

Shota doesn't appear thrilled to be going shopping even when he's dressed in black jeans and a matching black shirt, flopped on the couch with Nemo curled up on the small of his back, but he shoots Hizashi an annoyed, offended look when the blonde-haired man offers for him to stay home and sleep while they go.

Which is how Izuku finds himself tucked under Hizashi's arm as he leads the teen along in the mall, with Shota trailing a step or so behind them, shoulders slumped and hands buried in his pockets.

"Where do you like to shop, Kiddo?" Hizashi had asked, glancing down at Izuku.

Izuku's not sure how to say 'the cheapest place I can find' without sounding pathetic, so he shrugs his shoulders. Izuku remains silent at his teachers bicker about where to shop—Hizashi wants to visit expensive shops where he buys his own product, while Shota demands

they not go somewhere too expensive.

Shota wins in the end, when Hizashi glances down at the tense teenager tucked under his arm, clearly spotting the guilty fear on his face. He relents without fight after that.

Izuku is jarred, blatantly so, at everything that's added to their shopping cart for him when they arrive at a department store where the prices aren't horrific, but still not cheap quality. A good middle ground.

He'd been expecting to grab a bottle of nice smelling shampoo, and a new deodorant because his is getting to the end between all the physical activity he's been doing between classes and his own training schedule.

That's not what happens.

They'd started at the toiletries—but it wasn't just soap and other necessities. One by one, his teachers directed him to pick something that he likes and it's added to the cart without a word. He smells handfuls of shampoos, and conditioners, and body washes and deodorants.

He'd actually started to get a headache from the contradicting scents.

He gets a new toothbrush, and dental floss and frankly the most expensive toothpaste he'd ever gotten in his life. Hizashi had selected that for him and tossed it in the cart before he could mutter a word.

He thinks they're done after that—but instead of heading towards the checkout lanes, Hizashi turns the cart towards home goods section.

"Bedsheets," Hizashi had huffed when Izuku blinked in confusion, "the guest room needs new bedsheets."

But it's not just bed sheets.

It's a couple new pillows, and a comforter set that Izuku hesitantly picks out. Three different pairs of bedsheets and pillow cases, along with a plush black and white stuffed cat Shota glares fondly at before tossing into the cart without a word. His only excuse when Hizashi cocks his head in entertained confusion is: *'Looks like Blanket.'* which he mutters with a shrug of his shoulders before his hands are replaced in his pockets.

It *does* look like Blanket, but that's not the point.

Izuku feels bad they're spending all this money. It's a lot. He doesn't even want to know what the total is going to be. He knows that blankets and bed stuff and even toiletries are *expensive*. And when he tried to voice this, softly, but making sure they knew he was grateful for the effort, Hizashi had frowned thoughtfully, "we're just sprucing up the guest room, Kiddo! You're just the lucky first one to use it, ya'dig?"

And that's totally a lie if Izuku's ever heard one.

If that was true, Izuku would not be getting as much say in colours, and textures and just general likes and dislikes when it came to everything in the cart. Like how he'd reached out to feel the texture of a fuzzy blanket— unaware of the light smile on his face because it was so *soft*— only for Shota to toss it into the cart when Izuku stepped away from it.

And once again, just when he thinks they're done, Shota, now manning the cart, starts in the direction of the clothing section.

"Really," the teen tries in vain to deter them, "I don't need anything. I... I have clothes. Please don't waste your money."

"Izuku," Hizashi hesitates, clearly torn, "it's definitely not a waste. You only have a backpack worth of clothes. It's no big deal, I promise. We want to buy you some clothes. You should be comfortable. We want you to be comfortable."

"Problem Child," Shota sighs when Izuku bites hard enough at his bottom lip that the skin burns in threat if splitting open. "We're supposed to be taking care of you. What do you think your social worker is going to say when she comes around for that home visit and sees that you own only two pairs of your own, non-school related, clothes?"

A breath of anxious air rushes out of his lungs, and he stutters through a shaky inhale at the thought.

She was a nice enough lady, but her rules and requests held no room for error or complaint. There isn't a doubt in his mind that she won't hesitate to tear him away from this, his teachers, if she deems them unfit. He doesn't even think any pleading on his part would make a difference.

Izuku *wants* to stay with his teachers—they were familiar and kind, and honestly, it was most rational place for Izuku to be.

His teacher gives him a considering look before it slowly melts into an out-of-place soft expression, stepping close and carefully tucking Izuku into his side. It's the first time his homeroom teacher had ever really embraced him in any way. He'd gotten light touches, and head pats over the last couple days of being under his teacher's guardianship, but this was different.

Izuku melts into the half embrace before he even registers there's an arm around him. It's different than hugging All Might. It's even different than when Hizashi had slung an arm over Izuku's shoulder earlier. He's not sure why it's different, but it is.

"I know this is a lot, Kid, I get it." Shota's voice is barely a whisper, arching forward a little to be closer to Izuku's level without pulling away. His voice comes out so soft that Izuku's sure only he can hear it. He squeezes his eyes shut, forcing his teeth to release his lip when Shota gives him a light squeeze. "But trust me when I say we want to do this. We want you to have clothes, and your own bedding and possessions. You're staying with us; hopefully for a long time. We want you to be content, and happy, and taken care of. We want to take care of you."

"It's so much," Izuku whispers, finally blinking his eyes open. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I can't just—"

"No, don't be sorry." Shota shakes his head, "we're almost done, I promise. Pick out two pairs of pajamas, three shirts, two pairs of pants and a sweatshirt. Then we're done."

Intent to let Izuku pick his new clothes on his own, the dark-haired man lets the teen out of his hold, but doesn't move away yet. Izuku doesn't make any move to step away either, just worries his bottom lip between his teeth again.

He wishes Oboro hadn't opted to stay home with Izuku's laptop playing an old hero movie he'd found on a streaming site at the ghost's request. "Shopping is boring when I can't touch anything," the ghost had groaned in an attempt to guilt Izuku into letting him borrow his laptop, "and you never talk to me when other people are around—especially Sho and 'zashi."

And the guilt trip had worked.

He'd lingered for probably far too long in the guest room making sure Oboro was content. His laptop's volume loud, but just low enough that no one would hear it outside the room. He'd left a giddy ghost on his bed with the beginning credit to a movie Izuku hadn't even heard of playing.

He'd shut the door quickly after himself, letting out a silent breath of relief when the hallway remained silent despite the movie playing. He didn't want to have to explain why he was letting a film play while he wasn't even in the room—not even home.

"That's so much," Izuku breaths out again, shooting his teacher a betrayed glance.

"That's hardly enough." Hizashi counters, gaze shooting to Izuku like he wants to wrap the teen up in a blanket and buy the whole clothing department for him.

"*That's* a logical compromise," Shota huffs out, as if he'd predicted both their reactions. "Hizashi, leave the kid alone, and Problem Child, Hizashi wanted to buy you a full new wardrobe, so for the love of God, take the win."

Shota's hands are tucked in his pockets, stance slack as if he's not acting as a mediator. He's not annoyed per se, but Izuku thinks his patience is starting to run thin. Hizashi spins to glare softly at his husband, mouth opening to spurn the decision, eyebrows furrowed in discontentment.

Shota beat him to it though, turning sharply to the side, "I love you, but think about this from his point of view. I know you just want to spoil him rotten, but that's not what he wants. And... as much as I hate to veto you, I *am* the official guardian, 'zashi," Shota's gaze locks on Hizashi, lips pursed in understanding, "and you," he shoots Izuku a pointed look just a second after Hizashi's shoulders slump, "it's our money, and we get to choose how we want to spend it; and it's on you. So, pick what you want or we're picking for you and then I really won't be able to stop him."

That feels like... a threat.

Not a serious one, of course, they're talking about clothes and spending money. Frankly, most people would be happy in Izuku's position, so it *really* isn't a threat, but he *really* doesn't want to walk out of here with a full new wardrobe. That's far too much.

The teen shoots one last pitiful look at his homeroom teacher, but he stays strong, prompting Izuku on with nothing but a nod of his head in the direction of the racks of clothes.

So, the teen blinks with a sigh, trying to ignore the swirling guilt that he's somehow using their kindness, and taking advantage of them, even though they literally aren't letting him weasel his way out of it, and browses the clothing department.

He does as asked.

Picks out the required amount of clothes.

He's conscious of prices, but everything is roughly the same amount when it comes to each item. Finally, he makes his way back to the cart where the two adults are talking in hushed voices; Shota leaning against the cart's handle while Hizashi stands at the end with a defeated look and his arms loosely crossed over his chest. It's not tense, just... sullen.

"Sorry, Listener," Hizashi offers gently when Izuku comes back. His arms drop to his sides almost like he'd suddenly deflated. "I was being overbearing, huh? I just hate that you're in the position you are, and your landlord hasn't gotten back to me about your stuff, and I hate that you don't much and—"

"It's okay," Izuku smiles, nudging his shoulder against the Pro's arm is a bold gesture before he can second guess himself. He ducks his head, completely missing the surprised adoration on the Hero's face. Izuku means the words this time; not like when he'd thought about saying the same thing to All Might earlier. "I just don't want you wasting so much money on me."

"That's never a waste, Listener," Hizashi promises, catching the teen in a hug that Izuku can't help but return, pushing in closer, "never."

"He's right," Shota huffs, eyeing Izuku's clothing selection. He seems satisfied with the clothes, bowing his head lightly in a nod before speaking, "and now, as promised, we're done. Let's go. I'm tired of being here, and I'm hungry."

They're in the check-out lane surprisingly quickly. His homeroom teacher must be in a hurry to leave. The three of them are putting items on the conveyer belt to be scanned, but Izuku can't help but watch the price go up as everything is scanned through. He feels sick. He already sees a credit card in Shota's hand, waiting to be used.

Hizashi is still unloading the cart, but Izuku is to overcome with dread to help.

“I can help pay,” Izuku blurts quietly, desperately, and though it doesn’t make this feel right in the slightest, all this money being spent on *him*, it’ll definitely clear his conscious a little.

“Sure,” Shota nods easily without a glance in Izuku’s direction. “How much you got?”

“Wha— Sho!” Hizashi gasps, appalled. “No! He will not—”

“Around 5000¥,” Izuku offers slowly, pulling the bills out of his pocket and holding them out to Shota, who takes them without looking over at Hizashi’s gawking face.

It’s really not much—considering how high the number is climbing, but it’s most of his money that he’d had saved. There’s still a couple hundred yen tucked away in his school bag for emergencies, but that had been the bulk of it. It’s weight off his chest to contribute though, even if it causes Hizashi’s face to twist in disbelief.

“He doesn’t need to—”

“Hizashi,” Shota’s voice comes out low yet soft, almost like a warning. Izuku almost feels a little bad about how the blond-haired man physically wilts in defeat at Shota’s tone, pouting as he seems to accept the exchange without further protest, even if he looks like he wants too. Still, Shota continues softly as he tucks the money into his own pocket. “It’s okay.”

“Yeah,” the blonde man frowns, gaze flitting over to Izuku. He’s not sure what the Hero sees in his expression, but whatever it is makes Hizashi’s expression soften, “okay.”

Thankfully they don’t do much after shopping other than eat, but that’s not where the hecticness ends.

Thursday has Izuku staying after school with Shota for a visit to Recovery Girl. He’d honestly been dreading this part—and he’d known it was coming.

Still, it was one of the requirements his social worker had given, and honestly, he’s glad this physical is happening with Recovery Girl instead of some random pediatrician somewhere. He follows instructions as prompted, strips off his shirt for her to assess his old

injuries.

She asks about his history as she checks his vitals.

He's weighed and measured, and he feels like he's four years old again.

She does a heart exam, a lung exam, a head and neck exam. She does some simple neurological tests, and does a quick extremities exam—looking at his extra jointed pinky toes, and checking his wisdom teeth and appendix—the parts of him that scream: *Quirkless*.

It's a good thing Recovery Girl is already in the loop of One for All and knows he was Quirkless, or this could've been a very awkward examination.

Recovery Girl explains everything she does, and it helps to put him at ease.

Before he really knows it, Shota is back in the room with them, slumped patiently in the chair beside where Izuku is sitting. The teen is perched on the edge of one of the beds, and had been for the majority of the exam. The infirmary didn't have an actual exam table, so it was the best she could do.

"Underweight," Recovery Girl tuts out without Aizawa-Sensei even asking. "He's malnourished. Three meals a day, young man. Aizawa, you and Yamada need to make sure he's eating balanced meals. His Quirk burns through calories incredibly fast. You need some meat on your bones with those muscles, you hear?"

Izuku nods meekly. Shota looks thoughtful where he's sitting, but he doesn't say anything, just keeps his focus on Recovery Girl.

"And the poor thing's scarred beyond belief. You're lucky I know you're a Hero Course student who regularly breaks his bones or I'd need to report these healed wounds on suspicion of abuse. You need to get a handle on your Quirk, Dearie. Your body won't be able to handle these injuries reoccurring forever. At some point, my Quirk won't help anymore and you'll be left with permanent damage."

Izuku is yet to put his shirt back on, so when his teacher's gaze flicks back to see for himself, all Izuku can do it tuck in on himself. The wounds range from small, old scrapes that scarred over, to big, palm sized burns and other marks.

A lot of his wounds are from his newfound Quirk, but a lot of them are also from his childhood—growing up with Kacchan and his gang of bullies.

“We’re working on that,” Shota tells her easily, shooting Izuku a glance. “Anything else?”

“Everything else looked fairly normal,” the woman huffs softly. “His temperature is a little below average, which isn’t really cause for concern. It might affect his circulation though; let me know if you start experiencing weakness in your muscles, regular ‘pins and needles’ sensations on your skin, numbness or chest pains.”

“And you,” she turns to his teacher after he gives another slow, understanding nod, “you and Yamada watch for a pale complexion on him, or heaven forbid, a blue tint to his skin. Contact me, got it?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Shota ducks his head in a respectful nod. “We’ll keep an eye on that.”

“I’m just regularly cold,” Izuku tells her softly. “I always have been.”

He thinks it has to do with ghosts and how cold they are. He knows he always gets colder when Oboro is around, and it’s always freezing when he makes contact with the ghost, or he stands to close.

“Still,” the nurse shakes her head, “be mindful of it. Both of you.”

She’s quiet for a second, leaning back in her roller chair, “any questions for me?”

“Actually,” Shota speaks up before Izuku can shake his head in answer. His eyes shoot towards his teacher, but the man is looking at the nurse. She prompts him on with an acknowledging hum, “I was going to bring this up to his mother before shit hit the fan, but is it possible the kid could have some sort of... developmental disability? ADHD, maybe?”

Izuku’s sure his own jaw drops open, blinking a couple times at his teacher. A disability? A disability they'd noticed? Why?

“What have you noticed?”

“Lack of attention,” the man huffs blandly, and Izuku freezes. “He gets carried away with his thought in class and he’ll space out for a good number of minutes before coming back around. Gets lost in his own

tangents. He mutters to himself sometimes too. Yamada and I have both noticed it— there's nothing wrong with it, so please, Midoriya, don't give me that look. You're *fine*. We were just curious if there was something we could be doing to help with his focus."

Izuku hadn't even realized his expression had been dropping into something of... he's not even sure. He makes sure to press his mouth into a straight line and stare ahead though. They thought he had a learning disability-- or, how had his teacher put it? A developmental disability? And they were going to tell his mom about it too. He's not sure what to think about that.

He supposes he's glad they're looking out for him—that they're making excuses for him. He does space out a lot, but at the same time, he's a little... embarrassed? He'd been caught, many times apparently, if it was a concern at this point.

"It could be," the nurse hums out thoughtfully in agreement. "Among other diagnoses. We can set up additional testing, but that's for another day. He's been through enough today—take the poor thing home for the night. He's got a big day tomorrow, and hopefully I won't be seeing him."

"I'll try to not get hurt at the festival," Izuku finds himself saying, a tiny smile lifting to his face. "No promises though."

"He sounds like you," the nurse huffs a laugh, slapping Shota on the knee. The man blinks with a frown, glancing over at the teen. "I remember you saying the exact same thing to me years and years ago. *No promises though*. If I remember correctly, it was only a couple days later that you came in with that dislocated shoulder—caused by that silly capture scarf thing you were so enthralled by."

"I mastered that scarf," the man scoffs, though his cheeks have darkened with colour.

Izuku nods hurried in agreement, because Shota with his scarf was frickin' cool. He was amazing when it came to using the capture weapon.

"Yes, of course, Dear," the woman huffs, patting his knee like you would a child who'd been discouraged. "*Now* you have, sure. But back then I swear I saw you every week. Poor Yamada having to drag you in when you'd fall from the ceiling, or when you broke your bones—and of course there was more than just the one dislocation."

She gives a laugh like she's remembering something fond instead of a student making weekly nurses visits for seeming bad injuries. She cracks a smile before cocking her head in Izuku's direction, soft patting his knee as well, "don't take after him, Dearie."

Izuku looks over at his teacher who'd steadily gotten more and more flushed as the nurse talked on. She didn't seem to notice, or... or maybe she didn't even *care* that she was embarrassing him. Recovery Girl had never reminded him more of a grandmother teasing her grandchildren than she did right now.

The woman lets out another laugh, eyes twinkling as she looks at Izuku. Her gaze goes a little hard, knowing, as she continues, "I know I'll be seeing a lot more of you, so make promises you can actually keep. You children, you're all the reason I'm grey, I tell you."

"You are a Problem Child," Shota huffs under his breath, knee nudging Izuku's own.

"As were you," Recovery Girl scoffs, shaking her head teasingly. "You still are, fifteen whole years later. Twelve years since you graduated and you're still sticking around; still relying on my Quirk. You and Yamada both."

"Alright," Shota clears his throat awkwardly, the pink flush crawling up his cheeks again, "put your shirt on, Midoriya, let's go. Recovery Girl, we'll be in touch."

"Yes, yes," the woman waves them off, turning to her desk. Izuku listens as he pulls on his button-up and starts doing up the buttons. "Good luck tomorrow, Dearie. Do try to be careful."

"I will," the teen bows gratefully, "thank you for your help."

"Anytime, Child," she offers fondly.

"C'mon, Midoriya," Shota calls, the teen's blazer and tie draped his arm. "Before she starts telling more stories."

"I do have a bunch," the woman teases as Shota ushers him out the door. "Goodbye, boys. Take care."

It's that evening when he and Shota get home that the news of Izuku's landlord finally getting in touch with Hizashi comes to light. True to Oboro's word, the boxes of Izuku's belongs— clothes, All Might

merch, trinkets and knick-knacks were all stored away for him to come get.

According to Hizashi, his landlord had seemed relieved that Izuku was alright, and he didn't mind holding onto the boxes until Sunday, the earliest day all three of them would have time to stop by and collect them.

"He wished you good luck in the festival," Hizashi had told him, tone bordering on cooing. "It was very cute. He said he and his daughter would be rooting for you from home!"

"That's kind," Shota had mumbled from his spot on the couch, where Nemo was once again curled up in his lap. His fingers stroked along her head.

"Isn't it?" Hizashi grinned, "we'll be rooting for you too!"

"Unbiasedly," Shota added gruffly. "We like you, Problem Child, but your combatants are literally the rest of my students."

"I'll be biased."

"No, you won't," Shota huffed, "they're your students too. Unbiased, English teacher."

"Fine, fine," the blonde sighs, scratching at his scalp before dragging his finger back through golden locks, "I'll be unbiased, *but* a little biased because this one's mine. You should be a little biased too, he's yours as well."

Oboro cocked his head in Izuku's direction, having watched the whole exchange, "he'll definitely be completely biased towards you. It is a good thing he's just an announcer and not a judge, eh?"

Izuku can't help but snort a laugh, taking a sip of his tea to hide his pleased smile. He gives a light nod into his tea as the two Pros bicker over how *wrong* it was to be biased. *'Just a bit biased!' 'That's still biased.'*

The next morning Izuku wakes up to a ghost standing on his chest. Well, technically, he's *in* his chest and he's *jumping*. The springs in the mattress don't move at all under the ghost's non-existant weight, but Izuku feels like his heart is going to freeze in his chest.

"G'ff," he slurs out with a shiver. "I thought you weren't going to

wake me up like this."

"It's Sports Festival Day!" The ghost blurts like a child on Christmas morning. He's far too giddy, Izuku really needs to find a way for the ghost to sleep so he can return the favor and wake him up by swatting a hand through him. "Get up, get up! 'zashi made miso soup, rice, grilled salmon and eggs for breakfast! C'mon, c'mon, you gotta eat so you'll be ready to kick some serious ass today!"

Izuku sits up, frowning at the stuffed cat clutched in his arms. And the real cat at his side, watching the ghost apprehensively. "Good morning, Fish," the teen huffs, petting the old cat's ears back.

"He gets a good morning before me?"

"He didn't jump on my chest," Izuku snorts out, finally shoving his covers off, careful not to disturb the cat. The teen glances at the theatrically pouting ghost. "Good morning, Oboro," he huffs sarcastically, "you're in a good mood."

"Sure am," the ghost cheers, "I'm going to watch you win the Sports Festival today."

"Oh yeah?"

"Oh yeah!" The grin is wide, even wider than his usual squinty-eyes grin. This time he smiles so big his eyes squeeze shut. "I know you'll do great, wipe the floor with your peers."

"You're sounding biased," Izuku teased as he finally pushed himself out of bed, his new pajamas wrinkled from sleep.

"I'm one-hundred percent biased," Oboro's nose wrinkles with a wicked smile, "I don't have obligations like your teachers do."

"You really think I'll go well?"

"I know so!"

Well then, let the games begin.

Chapter End Notes

> I hope the All Might talk came out like I was going for-- entitled Pro Hero put in his place by angry green-bean child. Lets be real, there are few people who can actually get through to All Might, and Midoriya Izuku is definitely one of them.

Did I mostly want to tease Aizawa in this chapter? Yes, mostly. And Anxious Izuku because we all be anxious.

Also, sorry there wasn't a whole lot of Oboro. He'll be back next chapter, the poor green-bean's gotta be careful about talking to the ghost when others are around, and this chapter was pretty zawa and yama centric. Sorry ghosty boi.

Anyways! Hope you liked the chapter! As always, thanks so much for all the interaction and love this fic has been getting! I'm so incredibly grateful you guys are liking it! Seeing the interaction numbers going up makes me giddy, and I adore your guy's comments. So, thank you! Comment always appreciated, as are kudos!

I'll see ya in the next update! Thanks for reading!

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! Welcome back!
>
> This chapter will in fact be the beginning of the Sports Festival, but before that, there's a little bit more loose ends that I completely forgot about that I tied up.
>
> And on the topic of that, I will be including a *chapter warning* for *mentioned underage relationship/ nonconsensual relationship*. There is no detail of-- it's not even technically in the fic, just a misunderstanding. We already know there's no funny business going on, but yama and zawa don't, so I'll clear that up before we progress! I won't be tagging it at all, because it's not really there, but I will warn you guys here in case it's a trigger. Please know your limits and stay safe!
>
> Anyways! Please enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota knows something is off with Hizashi the second they settle on the couch together, Fish sprawled along the back of the couch, Blanket tucked between the draping edge of the throw blanket tossed semi-orderly across the back of the couch, and Nemo curled up in a tiny ball in Shota's lap.

Hizashi is pressed against the arm rest of the couch, his elbow settled against the arm rest, and fist supporting his head. Shota himself is pressed into his side, Hizashi's other arms thrown over his shoulders, fingers trailing softly across his collar bone. Shota's head is pressed against Hizashi's shoulder, close enough that if he turned his head, his nose would brush against the column of the blonde man's neck.

There's an American film playing, subtitles running across the bottom of the screen both because of the language barrier, as well as the fact Hizashi has the television volume set to the lowest setting for the teenager sleeping down the hall.

It's late.

Not incredibly late, but late enough that Hizashi had shooed Midoriya off to bed so he's ready for the festival tomorrow. The kid hadn't put

up any fight; simply smiled, bowed his head and wished them a good night.

Shota can't help but hope at some point the teenager will settle into this— relax a little around them. He in no way wants a moody, bratty teenager around, but he'd like to get to a point where Izuku is comfortable enough with them to be a just that. A normal teenager, content in their life and comfortable with their guardians.

He especially hopes the teen will settle down when he's finally here to stay. The underground hero knows the boy is nervous about the aspect he might be taken away from them, he thinks Izuku is biding his time and keeping himself at arm's length simply because he doesn't want to be stripped from what's become familiar to him for a second time in as little weeks.

The poor kid just needs some normalcy in his life—but it can't really be normal until they have the all clear for Izuku to remain with them. It would be cruel for Izuku to settle in, become familiar—a part of their odd little family and then be ripped away from it. It's cruel, but Shota won't put it passed social services.

At this point, he's not even sure they have the children in mind whenever he deals with them—never usually as one on one as this, Izuku's case and his direct participation, but in passing. They seem to like control, and relying on the easiest option depending. Just another corrupt government branch.

Shota won't lie and say he's not a bit nervous either about the thought his student might be pulled from his custody and shipped off to some shitty group foster home somewhere against his wishes. He knows he'd fight tooth and nail to get the kid back if that were to happen, but that could take weeks, months, or maybe even years.

He just prays everything works out, and the social worker is satisfied when that two-week trial period hits.

And he knows that's been a thought for Hizashi too—but that's not what's off about him.

He'd been vocal about how much he wants Izuku to stay, both to Shota in private, as well as to the teen in question as well; spoken easily about his worries that the teen may end up swept into the foster system despite the perfectly good home for him with them.

That's the thing about Hizashi—he'd always tended to be vocal about

his thoughts and worries. It was something Shota always admired about his husband, since he himself was terrible at showing emotion and putting things into words.

Shota lets his head fall back against Hizashi's shoulder softly, lulling his head so his ear presses against the junction between Hizashi's shoulder and neck. Hizashi is staring off in the direction of the TV, but Shota can tell he isn't watching it.

He studies his husband; thoughts of how *wrong* this feels only deepening when his husband doesn't even seem to notice the eyes on him. Shota's so used to getting caught staring at his husband that when he doesn't, it makes his skin prickle like something's wrong. His fingers are still dragging feather-like touches across Shota's shoulder absently, but he hasn't moved, or talked, or even glanced at the television.

Shota's gaze travels along his husband's jaw, before catching on his ear.

Huh.

"You're still wearing your hearing aids," Shota mumbles accusingly.

It's not like Hizashi doesn't like wearing them—he does.

He likes to hear his music, and conversations going on around him; being a part of said conversations. He listens to the TV playing the news when they have it on, and most recently, he likes to hear Izuku ramble— but in the evening, after long days of teaching and his radio show and patrol and villain fights, he adores the silence when decompressing.

The past couple days, since Izuku had fallen into their laps, he'd been wearing them until after the kid heads to bed before taking that much needed hearing break. They usually end up watching English films on nights like tonight where neither has anywhere to be (which is rare occasion between all their jobs), because he likes reading the English subtitles, even though he'd understand the words just as clearly as if they were speaking Japanese.

So to see him still wearing them when there's really no need this time of night after the kid's asleep and won't be looking for them, and since the two of them can still talk using JSL since that's the only second language Shota had made sure he was fluent in, it's a bit worrying.

As is the delay in which his husband drags himself from his thoughts.

“Huh?” Hizashi’s attention finally crawls back to Shota, chin angling to look down at Shota. His eyebrows furrow lightly in surprise at how close Shota is suddenly, their faces just hardly separated by the height of Hizashi sitting up, and Shota leaning down on him. “Oh... I must’ve forgotten to take them out when I changed.”

It’s not weird, per se, that they’re still in his ears. Hizashi wears them around the house a lot, but he had gone into their room and changed into his pajamas. That’s usually the point in which the blonde will take them out and charge them. It’s rare Hizashi forgets to take them out, because as loud as he is, and as much as he seems to like his own voice, he adores his evenings of silence before bed.

It’s how he winds down.

“What are you thinking about?” Shota shifts closer, and Hizashi’s arm tightens around him as he does so. He presses his ear against the blonde’s chest and Hizashi lets his chin settle on the top of his hand, the arm that had been supporting his head flopping down on the arm rest. The arms around him squeeze lightly after he asks, but Hizashi doesn’t answer right away.

Hizashi had been... off since yesterday afternoon. Not off enough for Shota to question it; sometimes Hizashi just needed some time to work through things alone before he’d seek another opinion or talk to him about it, but he’d seen the subtle change. He’d known Hizashi for fifteen years now, they’d dated for thirteen and have been married for seven. He knows this man better than he probably knows himself.

He knows when Hizashi is putting on an act; feigning his Present Mic, happy-go-lucky persona as opposed to stepping directly into it. Hizashi likes to keep up his front, even when he’s not quite feeling up to it—for the teachers, for Izuku, for the students. Sometimes even for Shota himself, which very, very rarely slips past the underground hero. He can tell the difference between the authentic Present Mic that Hizashi well and truly is, that side of himself that’s been there since the dark-haired man had met the blond years and years ago, and the Present Mic that Hizashi forces himself into to keep up appearances.

He’d been drawing a fine line between the two personas since yesterday, so something must’ve happened.

“I’ve just...” his husband sighs, fingers still sprawled on Shota’s collar

bone pausing, “I’m worried about Izuku.”

Shota squeezes his eyes shut, huffing out a breath. “We’ll do everything we can to keep him here, ‘zashi. We’ll jump through any hoops she puts in front of us, it’ll be okay.”

“No— well, yes. I... know. And, yeah, I am worried about that too, but I know we’ll find a way to make that happen no matter what. She’ll have to pry that boy from my cold, dead hands before I let him be swept away into some shitty foster system. Spoken as both his teacher, and the guardian who already *adores* the little green-bean.”

Well. That’s unsettling. *Too*. There was something else his husband was worried about. Shota agrees with the Izuku sentiment wholeheartedly though, his thoughts are just stuck on that word. Too. As well.

“Then... what *are* you worried about?”

Hizashi repositions, shifting so his head is no longer on top of Shota’s head. His chin angles, and despite the want to keep himself pressed close, to keep his face buried in Hizashi’s side, Shota shifts around too to be able to catch the blonde’s eyes. He doesn’t quite like the uncertain worry and hesitation clouding his lover’s eyes.

“Did you know Izuku’s been... spending time with Yagi?”

Shota cocks his head to the side, gaze shifting upwards to really look at Hizashi. Noting the worry creases in the blonde’s face, and how his mouth is pressed into a straight line that almost looks out of place. He’s thoughtful for a second, face unchanging before he ducks in a swift nod, “I’m aware they’re... close.”

That much was easy to tell.

Shota had been aware of their... familiarity from practically day one.

All the teachers knew, to a degree, that All Might was oddly intrigued by the teen. Anyone who’d taught beside All Might when it came to 1-A, could see the Pro’s attention periodically catching on the green-haired teenager. He watched them all, of course, but he lingered on Midoriya. He studied Midoriya, critiqued him in a way that was almost different than he did the other students.

The blonde is in no way stealthily secretive, even if he thinks he is— Shota remembers him talking about the boy way back on the first day.

He'd even drawled out an accusation for All Might's blatant favoritism, on the *first day* of official classes. Yagi had brushed it off, and in turn, so had Shota who'd had better things to be doing that standing like an idiot with the Number One Hero.

Then there had been what Tsukauchi had said to the boy—*you're All Might's kid, aren't you?*— when they'd arrived at the police station.

Then there was the obvious hero worship Izuku had for the Pro, but that wasn't Izuku specifically—it was hard to find children who'd never looked up to All Might at some point or another.

"Why?" the question rolls off the underground Hero's tongue easily, eyes focused completely on the other man. The television is nothing but white noise, easily drowned out by the chilling worry spreading through Shota's chest.

It wasn't odd to see All Might stop Izuku in the halls, talking hushed to the kid, but now that he's really thinking about it, did he do that with any of the other students, or just with Izuku?

Izuku had never seemed uncomfortable, or hesitant. Even now, most of the time, the teen's eyes didn't twinkle like an awestruck toddler, it always seemed... professional. Personal, but in a professional way.

Hizashi shifts again, that slow action that's somewhere between uncomfortable and nervous. He draws in a breath and looks away as he answers. "They came out of one of the conference rooms yesterday during lunch."

Shota bites his tongue before he can stupidly ask *'So?'*. Teachers coming out of conference rooms with students is hardly out of the ordinary. Just weeks ago, Shota himself had been in there with the kid. Hizashi had spent his fair share of time in those conference rooms as well, thought he tended to talk to kids in the comfort of the classroom instead.

There's something Shota is missing, or, maybe they're just looking at this from two different angles. Nothing about what his husband had muttered was particularly worrying to him but...

This is bothering Hizashi, so he'll hear him out. Afterall, Hizashi doesn't do this, act like this—be so deep in thought, so distracted—when it's not warranted. There's a reason. He'd seen something, and he's worried about it.

A second drags on before his husband finally looks back at him, brow pinched and lips downturned, “Izuku was *crying*, Sho.”

“Crying?” the dark-haired man repeated slowly, drawled like the word tasted bitter.

Hizashi’s head bounces in a nod, bottom lip pinned between his teeth.

To Shota, the revelation isn’t entirely surprising.

Midoriya cries. Quite a lot, actually. The teen has cried in frustration, and annoyance. He’d seen the boy tear up in pride after making good progress with his Quirk. Sometimes he cries when he laughs too much; he’d see that a couple time, when Ochako would mutter something to him, or Iida would say something probably stupid and class president like, like Tensei used to as well.

“’zashi,” Shota’s sure to keep his voice low, careful. He turns just a little bit more so he can keep direction eye contact with Hizashi, who’s attention slowly returns to Shota at the cautious call of his name. “Izuku cries a lot. That’s just... it’s who the kid is, I guess. Wears his heart on his sleeve— I mean, he was seconds away from crying when I talked to him about his Quirk, and he *asked* me to do that.”

“No, I know,” the blonde shakes his head, the frown deepening. “He’s cried in English too... it’s just.” He huffs out a low breath like he’s trying to figure out how to word his worries, “I just can’t shake the feeling that Izuku lied—that *Yagi* lied.”

Shota stills, “about what?”

“When I saw he was crying, I got worried, y’know? He’s my student, and I’d be worried about any of those little listeners crying, but it was *Izuku* crying, so I was really worried, because, y’know- well- you know how I am—”

“Because you’re as soft for him as you are for Fish.”

“Okay, rude,” the blonde huffs, shooting the dark-haired man a look of irritation that comes off far more fonder than anything else, “and I’m just as soft for you as I am for them— but I’m being serious here, Sho.”

“Sorry, I know.” Shota bows his head. “Why do you think they lied?”

“When I saw the tears, I asked if he was okay. And he... well, truthfully, he said he was alright. Which is fine. You know? He stuttered a bit, but he does that. It’s normal for him.” There’s a short pause, but before Shota can open his mouth the question what exactly the problem here *was*, Hizashi continued, “what’s not normal, is the fact that Yagi answered for him.”

“What?”

“Told me he was talking about some extra credit to boost Izuku’s grade.”

“He didn’t run that by me,” Shota shakes his head, a light frown tugging at his own lips.

“I know,” Hizashi’s tone turns sour. “I didn't ask about it until after Izuku left, but Yagi was just... he was just so innocent about it. They weren’t acting weird or anything. I probably shouldn’t be this worried, but to see Izuku leaving that room like that? Face red, and eyes puffy from crying. And All Might stepping out behind him all pleasant with a smile? I mean, maybe it’s true. Maybe that’s exactly what happened, just—”

Shota is quiet for a moment as the blonde cuts himself off, head turning and gaze shooting to the television to avoid any eye contact.

The dark-haired man blows out a slow breath through his nose, before hooking a finger under his husband’s jaw to gently force his attention back onto him. It doesn’t take much effort to get Hizashi’s attention back, but he keeps his fingers hooked even as he speaks, “what do you think happened in there, Hizashi?”

“I don’t know,” Hizashi whispers when they met eyes. “I just... it was a bad vibe. Izuku looked like he was caught doing something bad—like a kid caught stealing cookies or something, and h-how Yagi just... how he spoke over Izuku, answering for him. And the crying; he was full on crying in there, Sho. I’m just... I don’t want to believe anything bad happened, but I can’t help but *think*... he’s under our protection, ya’dig? What if we’re not... protecting him?”

The thought prickles at Shota’s skin.

He believes Hizashi one-hundred percent, but at the same time...

He just can’t see it.

All Might is fond of the kid, sure, but in like... a parental type of way. Maybe it's a bit closer to the kid than the other teachers had gotten, excluding Shota himself and Hizashi for obvious reasons, but Shota had never detected any ill intent when it came to Yagi and his Problem Child.

Shota teaches alongside the Number One Pro the most of anyone, and he'd never gotten any negative vibes from him. He'd gotten idiot vibes, sure. He'd wanted to turn around a kick the bastard for some of the things he says and does—how a man like Yagi Toshinori could be the Number One Pro but still suck at teaching and interacting with teenagers was beyond Shota.

But he'd never done anything bad. He'd never said anything bad. He was just a clueless idiot trying to trek his way through teaching a group of rowdy, infuriatingly powerful students.

And then there's the fact that Nezu would have vetted Yagi just as hard as he did all the teachers before allowing them to interact with the students. Number One Hero or not, it didn't matter that Yagi and the rat were close, Nezu wouldn't do anything that could jeopardize the school. He was too fond of it.

"I've never noticed anything," Shota decides to mumble softly. It doesn't disregard Hizashi's feelings, but it is an observation from the one who sees the most interactions between the teacher and the students. "Yagi is not an amazing teacher," Shota trudges carefully, and it's true. The idiot is often out of his depth, unsure about how to handle things, but that doesn't make him a threat to the students. "But I don't think he's doing anything to Midoriya, or any of the students."

He can't be sure of course.

Things slip through the cracks. Things can be covered up. Nothing is sure in this world, and as Heroes, especially Shota, an underground one, they've seen just how fucked up the world can be.

People can hide things. Izuku had hidden being homeless for three days, and probably would've for longer had the street lights... well, had the street lights not done what they did. Or, at least he thinks they did...

But still, he's fairly sure Yagi is not doing anything illegal to the green-haired child. Though what Hizashi saw is worrying, it's not a valid cause. He was certain this was a miscommunication—one Hizashi had let get into his head.

“Yeah,” the blonde swallows, fingers tapping rhythmlessly against Shota’s shoulder as a nervous tic, “maybe you’re right. Sorry, I just…”

“We can ask Izuku about it,” Shota finally breaks eye contact, letting his ear press back against Hizashi’s sternum, “if he is lying for Yagi then we’ll be able to see it, and from there we can look deeper if there’s a need too. I believe what you saw, ‘zashi, but we really can’t jump to conclusions so fast, especially about such a sensitive subject. It won’t due to accuse Yagi of something without having all the facts and concrete evidence.”

“You’re right,” Hizashi breathes out, and Shota feels the stutter in it from where his head is pressed against the blonde’s chest. He lifts his hand, the one that had hooked on Hizashi’s chin up beside his head, flattening it on the man’s chest and stroking his thumb lightly. “I just hate the thought that Izuku’s being hurt, y’know?”

“Yeah,” Shota blows out, hugging Hizashi closer. “You’ve gotta put some trust into the kid though. I know you’re worried, but try to relax a little until we can actually talk to him. Get answers from the source in a safe environment. Midoriya is a smart kid, he’ll come to us when he needs too.”

Hizashi hums, but doesn’t say anything else. Shota feels the man bury his nose in the lose strands of his dark hair and smiles despite himself, nuzzling against Hizashi in an attempt to return the comfort.

“C’mon,” the dark-haired man pats gently at his husband’s chest, pulling away and regretting it as soon as he does it. Still, it needs to be done. He’s sure Midoriya isn’t comfortable enough yet to find them sprawled on the couch tomorrow morning, sound asleep. And that would kill their backs, and necks. “It’s a big day tomorrow. Let’s head to bed.”

Shota gently ushers Nemo off his lap, the cat letting out an unhappy huff at being forced out of her comfy position. The underground Hero stands, stretching out his shoulders before holding a hand out to his husband. Hizashi stares at the hand for just a second before hid fond eyes lift to Shota’s face and he clutches the outstretched hand.

Together, without releasing their interlocked hands, the two walk silently to their room.

Izuku does not get dressed before stumbling out of the guest room.

It had been cold in his room, and it had been cold with a ghost stood in his chest, and it was cold outside of the warm cocoon of his blankets. His pajamas were warm against his body, and the All Might sweater he'd tugged on after shivering was warm, and it just made sense to savor the warmth for as long as he could without needing to strip it off so he could change into his uniform.

He pads into the kitchen, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. Oboro had woken him up a bit earlier than he'd set his phone alarm for, but if there was a big breakfast waiting for him, he wanted to have time to savor it.

The ghost was at his side, preppily keeping Izuku's slow, sleep hazed pace. His smile hadn't faded in the least, and it was honestly hyping Izuku up. It was nice to know the ghost had this much faith in him— was this excited to watch the Sports Festival purely because Izuku was playing a part of it.

"Good morning, Listener!" Hizashi greets when Izuku finally steps into the kitchen. The table is already laid out with the traditional breakfast Oboro had mentioned, and Izuku feels his mouth water at the sight. "I was just coming to wake you up! I'll be right back though; I do still have to wake Sho up. Don't let the cats up onto the table!"

Izuku gives a tired nod, smiling when his teacher passes by before beelining down the hallway. He hears the man greeting Fish, who must've come out of Izuku's room, before he hears a door open.

Izuku moves to sit down at the chair that he'd been using, a giddy feeling in his chest as he internally claims it as his own. It's been a while since he'd done that. *My spot.*

"I'm so jealous, dude," Oboro huffs out a sigh, but even that sounds happy and excited. The ghost plops into the only chair at the table the doesn't have a meal in front of it, frowning at the array of food. "This looks so good."

"It does," Izuku agrees, fingers twitching to pick up the chopsticks and dig in. He doesn't— that would be rude, but he's tempted too. It smells delicious. Izuku feels something brush up against his leg, and looks down to see Blanket, and not far behind him is Fish, sitting in the doorway. "Sorry you can't have any."

"I'm used to it," the ghost waves him off, shooting Izuku a light smile that doesn't completely reach his eyes. It's still warm and honest, but it's a downgrade from Oboro's usual look. "The woes of being a

ghost."

"You're sorry *who* can't have any?" Izuku jolts upright in his chair, turning towards the doorway so fast his back cracks and he fears he's going to get whiplash. All he can do is stare at his teacher like a deer caught in the headlights of vehicle.

Shota is stood in the doorway, one eyebrow raised perfectly in question. He's not yet in his hero costume, instead sporting a pair of pink sweatpants and a '*Put Your Hands Up*' radio tee-shirt that looks very similar to the one Izuku had been given. For a second, Izuku wonders how many of those shirts are floating around here, but he's quick to force his attention back onto the current situation.

Izuku's eyes jerk away from his teacher, lingering on the ghost who blinks unhelpfully before he realizes *bad idea* with his teacher already watching him, so his gaze drops to his lap. And that's where he spots his saving grace— "Blanket!" the teen blurts. "S-sorry, Blanket, you, uh, you can't have any. You... you're a cat."

The cat blinks at him, then bats at Izuku's bare foot before standing up and strutting away as if offended to be Izuku's scapegoat. Izuku watched the cat leave, and when he meekly lifts his head, he sees Shota's gaze following the cat out of the kitchen.

"Woow, nice save," Oboro snorts a laugh into his fist, tone so clearly teasing that Izuku has half a mind to whip his hand through Oboro's arm and pray he makes contact. "That totally fooled 'im. You're a master of deception, Izu."

He's being tested. His level of restraint is definitely being tested.

"...right," his teacher's eyebrows furrow, but thankfully he still appears too tired to question it. The dark-haired man steps into the room, ruffles Izuku's bedhead as he walks past towards the coffee pot that's just finished brewing.

Izuku tries not to feel giddy when his teacher's fingers tousle through his hair as he passes, but he knows he probably has a stupid grin on his lips. And that's made clear by how Oboro huffs out a light, teasing little *'awh~'*. Restraint. Swatting at the air will look weird. Restrain yourself. Izuku lets out a huff of air instead of interacting with the ghost, but he can't help but let a smile curl onto his lips as he sees Oboro's wide, boyish grin.

Hizashi returns just a second later as Shota is finally joining Izuku at

the table with his mug of coffee. Hizashi, unlike himself and Shota, is already dressed in his Hero costume with his hair up. He's not wearing his support items—his directional speaker is missing, and he's still wearing his regular hearing aids instead of the ones that are a part of his costume.

"Big breakfast for a big day, can't have my favorite listeners going hungry, now can I?" the blonde man cheers with a wide grin. He steps around Shota in order to get to his own seat, hand running along his shoulders as he moves. "I can't wait to see how all you Listeners do. This festival is usually about the second and third years, but something tells me we'll have a hard time keeping our eyes off 1-A."

"You think so?" Izuku cocks his head, holding his chopsticks now, but still waiting for his guardians to start eating first.

"Certainly!" Hizashi nods cheerfully, finally picking up his own chopsticks and digging in. Izuku follows suit, scooping some rice into his mouth. "Your class is a riot. Between the Quirks and the attitudes —it'll definitely be entertaining. I am so glad we'll be commentating!"

"You're telling me," Shota huffs into his coffee mug. He seems to favor that over his food, but that really doesn't surprise Izuku in the slightest. "Though *riot* isn't quite the word I'd use to describe them. I don't know how you talked me into commentating."

"Awh, Sho, you're just a stick in the mud," Hizashi shakes his head with a laugh, "I think they're fun. Those agency scouts are totally in for a treat between your class and the second and third years. This year's festival is gonna be amazing!"

"It totally will be," Oboro chimes in, grinning brightly at Izuku. He's hunched over, elbow on the table and palm supporting his chin. He really just looks happy to kinda be a part of the conversation. To be heard. "You'll totally kick ass and place. I just know it!"

Izuku hides his own smile behind a bite of salmon.

The conversation fades off. Izuku's eager to stuff his face with the delicious meal. He's both extremely excited, and extremely anxious for the festival. He hopes he lives up to Oboro's expectations, but he's really just going to try his best and hope to place. "Do you think All Might is going to be around to watch the festival?"

There's a heavy silence that surrounds him following the question.

When he looks up, both his guardians are staring at him, he notices two things.

First, Hizashi's eyes are locked on Izuku, chopsticks slack in his fingers and mouth agape slightly.

Secondly, beside him, Shota is also staring, just instead of at Izuku, he's staring at Hizashi. His features are tightened in warning, and his fingers tense around his chopsticks.

The silence drags on for another long second.

"Not now, Hizashi," Shota huffs out almost under his breath, "he needs to focus on the festival."

"So do we," the blonde retorts softly, tone edging towards a whine.

"What's the matter?" Izuku can't help but ask, lowering his hands to his lap as he looks between his teachers. Shota's gaze snaps towards the teen, reading his expression before he looks back at Hizashi.

Hizashi's gaze doesn't stray. "I can't focus on the festival, Sho, not until I know for sure."

"You guys are seriously gonna do this *now*?" Oboro groans, head hitting the table. Izuku's almost expecting the telltale 'thump' that always comes when someone drops their forehead on a table, but it doesn't come. His eyes flick towards the ghost in question, but Oboro's not looking at him at all. "You have the absolute worst timing, 'zashi."

Izuku can almost feel as the light atmosphere drowns under the sudden seriousness. It's almost tense, and he's not sure what to think or say. No one says anything for a long moment—his teachers seemingly having a conversation in with their gazes. The longer the silence drags on, the more worried Izuku gets until he finally can't stand it, "did... did I do something?"

"No," Shota blurts just as soon as the words leave Izuku's mouth. "No, Kid, of course not. This is..."

"It's something else," Hizashi tells him, straightening up and setting his chopsticks aside. "You're not in trouble, Kiddo. Not in the slightest."

Oh no. Undivided attention.

“Don’t freak out,” Oboro whispers beside him, finally looking up again. “I uh, I probably should’ve warned you this was coming, but… well, I didn’t think they’d to this now; right before the festival.”

And wow, doesn’t that fill Izuku with confidence. *Not.* That didn’t help in the slightest—in fact, he’s even more nervous.

“If… it wasn’t something I did, then… then what’s wrong?”

“Izuku, sweetheart,” Hizashi starts slowly, almost uncertainly, “if someone was… hurting you, you’d tell us, right?”

“Hurting me?” Izuku cocks an eyebrow, frowning at his teachers. Despite his earlier protest, Izuku has Shota’s undivided attention as well. He almost wants to squirm under their intense gazes, fiddling with his chopsticks as he continues slowly, “I… yeah, of course… I mean, I guess… yeah. W-why?”

His eyes flicker back to Oboro, who’s biting at his bottom lip. He doesn’t dare more his head, but his eyes leave the ghost almost as fast as they’d settled on him. “What’s going on?”

Hizashi draws in a breath, and Shota seems to lean in closer; curiosity and protectiveness all rolled into one odd facial expression.

“All Might has never done anything that… oh, I don’t know… made you feel… *uncomfortable*, has he? Nothing… inappropriate?”

“All Might?” Izuku feels his brain stutter to a halt. All Might doing something that made him feel uncomfortable? Like what? And, what constituted inappropriate? What was going on— Izuku froze. No… they didn’t… Where on earth would they get that idea? “Inappropriate how?”

Hizashi bit his bottom lip, glancing away before returning his gaze onto Izuku, “why were you crying when you left the conference room on Wednesday?”

Oh. *Oh*. That. Right.

He’d known this talk was coming at some point, but he hadn’t known it would be like this. Maybe All Might had gotten into more trouble than Izuku had first assumed when leaving him there with Hizashi.

Still, it’s completely *wrong*. All Might hadn’t done anything but sort of overstep and then hug him in an attempt to calm Izuku down—and *to*

be fair, Izuku was the one who'd hugged him first.

"No, nothing of the sort." Izuku sucks in a breath, eyes dropping to his bowl of miso soup. They're watching him, studying him. He blows out the breath, wincing as he explains, "I just... well, I told him about my mother."

"You... you did?" Shota speaks for the first time since Hizashi took over the situation. "Why? I didn't think you wanted anyone to know, which is completely fine. Everyone who needs to know, does now but... I'm curious as to why you told All Might."

Honestly, if All Might hadn't have brought it up, Izuku wouldn't have told him. But he's not going to tell his teachers that. That seemed like it would be more problems than it was worth. And he honestly didn't want to get All Might into trouble—they'd already sorted their problems out.

"We're... close," Izuku tells them slowly, cheeks instantly flushing at the floundering look of panic on Hizashi's face. Shota's face had twisted up similarly, but not quite as animated. "N-not like that!" Izuku waves his hands frantically, accidentally phasing through Oboro, "I mean, like, we met before Yuuei... he, he saved me from a villain in middle school and since then he's been... I don't know, sorta keeping an eye on me? In like, a completely professional, hero, uhm, *guardian* sorta way because, um, ew? I don't... he's not... e-ew."

And maybe the words tumble out before he can organize them—and maybe that might come off a bit rude—the ew's might be a bit uncalled for— but Izuku has never even thought about anything of the sort. He'd never once felt uncomfortable with the Pro. Frankly he's a bit freaked out at the insinuation. All Might would never hurt him like that.

"Dude's like fifty," Oboro added unhelpfully, cocking his head in Izuku's direction, eyebrow quirking with a knowing look. He's glad only he can hear the ghost's addition to the conversation, though even he doesn't really want to hear it. It's true though. Izuku's only fifteen, and All Might is... well, at least fifty. "That is ew."

"I forgot you mentioned that you'd met All Might before school, but I didn't think the two of you were that close. I think... that might answer your question, Hizashi," Shota blinks, the corner of his lips twitching up faintly before straightening again, "*ew* is a perfectly logical answer. The kid's definitely not lying."

Hizashi is quiet for a second before his eyes are back on Izuku, searching his expression. He's relaxed a bit, but there's still that underlying cloud of worry in his eyes. "All Might said you two were talking about extra credit work, not your mother."

"Well," Izuku bit his lip, rubbing at the back of his neck, "we were. Kinda. I mean, we were talking about my Quirk really because it's... it's so similar to his and I was wondering if he had any tips for me... He also asked about my grade slipping while we were together, and since I've known him for a while now, and... and I'm comfortable around him, I told him about my mom. I... I can't really talk about her without, y'know, without crying so he... he gave me a hug. Sorry, I... I thought he would've told you when you asked..."

"The idiot probably should've just told me," Hizashi huffs, but it he seems to deflate in relief. "Would've saved me a whole lot of worrying. Keeping secrets from me about my own kid."

"He was trying to protect me, I think," Izuku lets out a watery laugh, dragging his nails along his pajama covered thigh. "I told him I wasn't telling anyone—that I hadn't told anyone and that... that Shota found me. I don't think he knows I'm staying with you as well... Who, uh, who knows you guys are t-together? Married?"

"Oh," Hizashi blinks, quiet as he processes the thought. "Yagi... does *not*, I don't think... Did you say anything to him about us, Sho?"

"Why would I tell him?" Shota snorts, sipping his miso soup. "You're the talkative one, you talk to people more than I do. And he's never around when we're together, plus we never wear our rings in costume, nor when we're at school, so I don't see how the idiot would know we're married unless Nemuri or one of the other teachers blabbed."

"Oh God," Hizashi whines, rubbing at his forehead, "I feel awful—he was just looking out for our little Listener, and I... I won't lie—it *looked* suspicious, definitely, but he had good intentions. You just... you'd been crying, Izuku, and I didn't know what to think, and then he made up that excuse that technically wasn't an excuse, but also not the truth, not entirely, and it was... it was just *suspicious*!"

"Did you really think he'd do... do *that*?" Izuku can't help but ask.

He supposes with what Hizashi had witnessed, just the end of the interaction—seeing Izuku leave the room with teary eyes and flushed cheeks— he could see the misunderstanding, but he also knew All Might had never done anything that made him uncomfortable.

“No,” Hizashi breaths out, defeated, “not really. I know he’s a good guy. He’s a good Pro. I trust and respect him, but when it came down to you… I don’t know, I just… I lost it a bit. Got caught up in my thoughts.”

“Who’d’ve though Hizashi was a mama bear?” Oboro’s leaned back in his chair, watching the exchange. “I would‘ve put my money on Shota to be honest. You kids bring out the dad in him; make him all soft and protective.”

He doesn’t look the least bit worried, or freaked out, and Izuku just knows the ghost is well aware of everything going on on both sides of this—of the truth about Izuku and All Might (because the ghost was literally the only person to actually know the full extent of it) as well as the thought process on his teacher’s side.

Izuku briefly thinks about standing up and switching seats to he can sit in Oboro, but decides against it. He’s a bit annoyed the ghost is watching this all play out like some drama he’s been predicting the outcome for. He’d been right, Izuku would’ve *appreciated* a bit of a warning.

The blonde man leans back in his chair, palming at his forehead again, “we’re supposed to protect you, ya’dig? And I thought maybe we weren’t and it was irrational—”

“Not completely irrational,” Shota shakes his head as he takes a bite of grilled salmon, “it did look suspicious. I think anyone would’ve been worried seeing a student leaving a private meeting with a teacher like that. You were right to be suspicious. Yagi could’ve saved us all a lot of trouble if he’d just told you, but I do respect the fact he respected Izuku’s privacy. We should probably inform him that we’re married, and that you’re just as much Problem Child’s guardian as I am.”

“That would probably be smart,” Hizashi huffs, finally picking his chopsticks back up. “To avoid future instances like this. I am so glad this was all just one big misunderstanding. I’m not sure my heart could take it if it was true… That’s a yucky thought.”

“All Might has never said or done anything that made me uncomfortable,” Izuku tells them both, feeling the need to defend the Pro. It’s also a halfhearted attempt to quell the last of their worries. This was a false alarm—Izuku was fine. “But if he… if he ever *does*, which he *won’t,* I… I’ll tell you.”

“That goes for everyone, not just Yagi,” Shota tells him seriously. “I

hope this goes without saying, but you can come to us with anything, Izuku. We're doing something wrong as your teachers and guardians if you feel like you can't be honest with us. Any problem you're facing, whether you're still living with us—"

"Which you totally will be, we'll make sure of it!" Hizashi chirps, cutting Shota off.

The dark-haired hero huffs in annoyance before continuing as if he hadn't been disrupted, "—or somewhere else, we'll always help you out. You're my student, my current ward, but most importantly, Izuku, you're *my* kid, and nothing that social worker says will change that, got it?"

"Got it," Izuku nods lightly, feeling his cheeks heat up. "Thank you."

"Nothing to thank me for, Problem Child. You just remember that no matter what."

"Y'know, that went a lot better than I thought it was gonna," Oboro tells Izuku with a wide grin, "what a show. You only squirmed a little —honestly, 'zashi and Sho squirmed more. Props to you, Izu!"

Izuku does not pretend to wobble in his chair and *accidentally* flop into the chair by his side. Oboro doesn't jump up with a hiss of discomfort and a fierce glare as a chill of ghost presence climbs up Izuku, and the teen doesn't excuse himself with a bashful half-smile and a claim of being tired while he subtly shoots the ghost a triumphant, teasing grin.

His teachers certainly don't share a glance of confusion, before waving Izuku's oddness off and dismissing him to get dressed for the day.

Of course not.

But... serves him right.

Oboro finds himself tucked in a small corner of the observation/ emcee booth stationed in the audience of the stadium in which the Sports Festival takes place. It has, arguably, the best view of the arena in which the students will compete, but, despite the good seat, Oboro can't help but wish he was down there too.

Every year he's up here, and every year, despite how interesting this is —seeing all those nifty Quirks and the next round of talented heroes

showing their stuff, he's always bored.

It's boring watching but not participating.

It's boring seeing things; watching and being impressed and wanting to share the amazement with his friends—which is impossible and has been for a good thirteen years.

It's boring listening to the small talk shared between Shota and Hizashi, and not being able to add anything. Listening to them talk and knowing he's not really there. That he doesn't really exist—not to them, at least.

It's boring, but it happens every single year. This emceeing gig Hizashi bends over backwards to do every single year since he'd started teaching at Yuuei.

It almost feels like it's different this year though—he's got Izuku. Someone sees him. He's actually watching someone compete that he can cheer for, someone he can praise and congratulate, and rave about their performance. He's psyched.

It feels different, but he knows it's not.

"No," Izuku had narrowed his eyes into slits. Class 1-A had left to follow Shota to the stadium, but Izuku had lingered back unnoticed, gaze locking on Oboro.

"I literally haven't said anything," the ghost had huffed with a laugh. He fiddles with his own fingers, cocking his head. His tone curls in a teasing manner, already knowing what the boy is no-ing him for. "No what, Izuku?"

"No," Izuku repeats, his lips now quirked with humor, "not yet, but I can practically read your mind at this point. No, you're not allowed to help me. In fact, you're not even allowed to step foot on the grounds, capisce? I have to do this alone."

"Technically, even if I do help, I really am not, because without you, I'm nothing, y'know? I'm basically a figment of your Quirk."

"Nice try," the teen snorts. "You're speaking of a Quirk that doesn't really exist—at least according to my medical history and the school records. No cheating. You're your own person—your own person who will not be using my person at all."

Oboro pouts, bottom lip jutting out. “So, I’m just supposed to watch?”

“Yes?” Izuku laughs, “That is what everyone else will be doing, yeah? Shota and Hizashi are running the emcee booth. Hang out with them.”

“I do that every year. Boring.” The ghost groans, falling forwards dramatically. He fully expects to phase right through the teen, but to his surprise, his forehead catches on Izuku’s shoulder. The teen gives a shiver, angling his head to arch an eyebrow at the ghost, but Oboro is too busy grinning. “We’re getting so good at this.”

“All the more reason for you to hang back,” the teen lifts a hand and pushes Oboro’s head off of him. Initially, he catches on the ghost, just enough pressure to push, but he slips through Oboro a second later. Oboro stumbles, pout deepening as the hand jumbles his brain momentarily. “I want to keep this Quirk a secret until I have more control over it. Until we really see what we can do.”

“What if you’re in danger?” Oboro drawls dramatically, “you want me to just sit back and watch you *suffer*? The one person I can actually *aid*, and you want me to do *nothing*? I’m a hero at heart, ‘zuku, ya’know I can’t just do that.”

“Fine, drama queen.” Izuku huffs, “if I’m about to die, and only if I’m about to die, you’re allowed to help me. I’ll give you permission for that. Don’t let me die, but... besides that, don’t interfere.”

“Great!” The ghost chirps. “I’ll keep that in mind then. I’ll be rooting you on from way up in that boring booth with your teachers who can’t see me... Hey, actually, do you think if I talked into the microphone you’d be able to hear it? That would be so—”

“That would be distracting,” the green-haired teen scoffed lightly, but Oboro could see the wheels turning in the teen’s head at the suggestion. “We will definitely test that, just not today. If you talk to me through that mic, I will definitely make it my life mission to walk through you every chance I get. And remember, I live with you now.”

“What if I’m solid?” Oboro teased, following behind the teen who’s now fleeing the room to catch up with his peers. “What then?”

“Even better, I’ll be able to actually smack some sense into you.”

“Ouch,” Oboro gave a hearty laugh, knowing that Izuku would never despite the threat. It was nothing more than playful banter, an empty threat. “Many have tried, none have succeeded.”

“Sounds about right,” the teen drawls lowly, shooting back a clearly teasing smile. The teen’s nose wrinkles up as he grins, eyes squinting along with his nose.

“Hey!” the ghost laughs again, but takes his leave instead of pushing Izuku any further. He’s got to be prepared for the festival, and Oboro definitely won’t be aiming to distract him. Despite his teasing, he has no plans of trying to intervene at all.

The Sports Festival is like a sacred trial for the students. It’s a means to be flashy—to get noticed, and Oboro won’t stand in the way of Izuku flourishing. Even if he really, very much wants to stand beside him and watch from the sidelines, or better yet, Izuku’s direct side, he’ll hand with his friends in the boring box and watch like Izuku wants him too.

Oboro drags his fingers through his cloud like locks, huffing out a heavy sigh before finally making his way the that oh-so familiar emcee booth. The woes of being a ghost.

Izuku was going to die.

He was going to die—

—of *devastation*! Of *embarrassment*! What kind of a friend would Oboro be if he left Izuku to suffer that fate? Izuku looked as good as dead—eyes glazed over and steps small but certain. It was definitely the work of a Quirk, and Oboro knew exactly who the Quirk belonged to. He knows exactly what's happening, but that doesn't make the panic slowly thrumming through his chest any easier to digest.

Honestly, he’s down in the arena, hovering uselessly by a hazy-eyed Izuku’s side before be even knows what he's doing. Before he has a chance to think and be rational. The teen had turned slowly away from his competitor, taking one slow, measured step after another towards the white out of bounds line behind him.

And yeah, Oboro panics. This feels cheap. This feels like a dirty trick. When had Hitoshi even activated his Quirk? What even was his Quirk — truthfully, Oboro hadn't kept many tabs on the purple-haired teenager. He knew the basics of Hitoshi's Quick, but he'd never really witnessed it up close and personal. Hitoshi didn't get a lot of practice with it outside of Quirk training and counselling, which is why it's entirely *terrifying* to see Izuku’s eyes glazed over, eyes unseeing and ears unhearing. He looks too dead for Oboro’s comfort. And he’s seen

dead. He'd seen *himself* dead.

It's not a good look; and it makes his nonexistent heart hammer anxiously in his chest.

But at the same time, this is how Shota had made his way into the Hero Course. A Gen-Ed kid who'd kept his scarily cool Quirk to himself until he could really shine. It's smart—so incredibly clever, but it feels so wrong to see it happening to Izuku. A small part of Oboro wants to root for the underdog, and he would be if it wasn't Izuku that Hitoshi was up against, like he'd rooted for Shota all those years ago after being taken out in the early stages of the dual battles, but the bigger part of himself is hyperfocused on his friend.

Oboro knows he shouldn't do anything. He shouldn't.

Izuku wouldn't want him too.

Sure, the teen wouldn't want to go out like this, but he wouldn't want Oboro to jolt him out of it. He has a feeling the cold chill of a ghost touching him would give him that clarity—force him from the hypnotized state, but Izuku wouldn't want that.

"'zuku," the ghost croaks out, standing between the boundry line and his friend who's slowly inching closer. The teenager on the other side of the arena is watching intently, a small frown tugging at his lips. Oboro frowns too. "Izuku," the ghost chimes louder, "c'mon, man, I don't wanna see you go out like this. You're so close!"

Izuku continues to step. One after another. Slow, but steady. He doesn't blink. His expression doesn't change. Oboro's not even really sure if the teenager's there. He's there, but not there. Not like he usually is, and it's unnerving.

It's a losing battle, the ghost knows.

He backs up slowly, still calling out to the green-haired teen in waning attempted to break him out of this without really breaking him out of it. Each step forwards Izuku takes, Oboro matches with one backwards until he's on the line. He glares down at the white underfoot, taking that last step off.

Izuku is two steps off—he's so close to being out of bounds—to *losing*.

And then he stops.

And he stumbles, the toe of his lagging shoe catching on the pavement.

And Oboro is moving without thinking, reaching out to catch the teenager. He honestly doesn't mean it—it's second nature to try and protect someone from damage. He'll always try, even when he goes right through them.

But he doesn't this time.

Oboro doesn't feel anything as he drops to his knees under Izuku's weight, the green-haired teen's conscious, yet unseeing gaze still locked on nothing. The boy's prone body supported by Oboro's arms under his armpits, he doesn't move in the slightest.

His brain lags behind the usual haze that comes with being solid—and he only notices he's done something *more* when he *sees* it.

Oh no.

Shota watches Izuku pause. The teen freezes abruptly, but doesn't completely appear to be coming out of the hypnosis Hitoshi put him under. The teen doesn't move a muscle, not backwards to continue his fight, or towards the threatening white line painted along the floor.

He's three steps away from the boundaries line—maybe two—he's not sure.

It's too far to really tell. Only the cameras and ground referees will be able to say.

Shota crosses his arms across his chest, torn between being a bit disappointed he won't be seeing his Problem Child competing anymore, but also distantly intrigued by Hitoshi's progress. He knows the purple-haired teen is throwing his all into this battle, that Hitoshi is desperate to make it through. It's been a while since Shota had seen a move like this from a Gen-Ed competitor—the last time he'd seen this successfully done, had been when he himself did the exact same thing. He'd had high expectations for Hitoshi, but facing off against his number one Problem Child is a challenge in and of itself.

For a second, nothing moves. The crowd is nothing but dull, confused murmurs and varying waves of confused silence, Hitoshi looks confused; like he's tempted to step towards his competitor. Hizashi is near silent at Shota's side, doing nothing more than letting out even

breaths of air as he watches on, waiting like everyone is.

Izuku stumbling down had Shota leaning forwards in concern. He sees the purple-haired boy lurch like he wants to check on his opponent, out of the corner of his eyes, but the teen remains in place. A small thrum of pride washes through Shota's chest at the knowledge that Hitoshi is concerned for Problem Child, his competitor, but he smothers it down under a mask of unbiased disinterest.

That's not the surprising part though—no, the surprising part is how Izuku, despite his legs knocked out from under him, hovers for just a second, before he's dropping down to his knees completely, *gently*, almost *guided*. His hands don't fall down. His torso doesn't drop. He just... hangs.

There's hardly a second to ogle the absurdity—Shota can barely blink his eyes when something, a fog, or smoke, or something along the lines fills the arena. It's thin, misty, almost like Midnight's sleep-inducing aroma.

It's the closest comparison he can come up with in the moment, but it's also so completely different. It's a light grey-ish white, like traditional fog. Natural fog, he should say. This is not natural fog. This is fog indoors. Faintly familiar indoor fog.

It's almost fluffy, how it spreads, but it's so obviously fog. Fog coming from the arena.

The fog takes over so fast. It's just... it's *there* one second. He can just barely make out the two boys in the arena before it gets to dense but —no, wait, *three* boys—*What. The. Hell?*—

Hitoshi looks beyond confused, gaze looking around for answers as he's quickly enveloped by the fog— Izuku on the other hand, is now on the ground, knees tucked under him like he's crumpled forwards, but was *caught*. His torso and hands are still up, like he's resting in someone's lap. And there's... wait, *who is that?*

There's someone down there with his Problem Child. He can just faintly see the two together.

He feels himself stand before he even knows what he's doing, pushing himself forward to the point his nose is almost pushed against the Quirk repellant window.

Beside him, Hizashi's chair squeals as it's shoved back by the sheer

force for him standing up abruptly. His hands slam down on the counter and he's leaning just as close to the window as Shota himself is.

The fog fills the entirety of the boundry outlines in less than three seconds. Nothing can be seen past the hazy, fog like cloud hovering.

"*What the fuck?*" Hizashi babbles dumbly at Shota's side. The dark-haired hero is glad that it comes out in *English*, considering Hizashi had not muted his mic. The audience has fallen under an unnatural, frankly pretty rare awestruck silence at the sight, but Shota can just *stare*.

Yeah, Hizashi's sentiment carries to him: *What the fuck?*

Chapter End Notes

And I'm back again!

I actually have another question for you guys! I've been thinking about splitting this up into different parts. Like maybe the first two seasons being a completed work, and so on with the rest of the seasons. I've been thinking about maybe writing the movies in as seperate works and making this a series (which I'd ideally organize between the completed works in an attempt to make everything run on the canon timeline), but I'm not quite sure if I will yet. So, would you guys prefer one big huge fic, or something sectioned off?

Also, sorry this is a lil late, I got my Covid booster yesterday and now I'm kinda dizzy? Of course it's me who gets side effects when my mom and bro are right as rain. Also, rip to me putting things off and then getting inspiration to write at the worst times. Apologies for any mistakes here, or if things don't run smoothly, I'll work out the kinks later! Also, sorry to skip right to Shinsou vs. Izuku, I didn't want to rewrite stuff without Oboro intervention!

Anyways, as always! Thanks so much for taking the time to read and comment! I'm so happy this is being so well recieved, and I absolutely appreciate all the comments and kudos this has been getting. We hit 2k kudos, which is mind boggling! So, thank you!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! I am so tired.

This fic is a bit shorter than usual because I kept writing stuff, hating it, then deleteing it! I'm still not completely sold on this, but the longer I stare at it, the more I'll want to either rewrite, or put it off, so hopefully you guys like this!

Also, I just... we hit over 100 comments on the last chapter and I'm *s h o o k* I don't think any chapter of anything I've ever made has ever hit that many comments, and I'm just so grateful. Thank you all for reading and commenting! It makes me soo happy that you guys are liking this still!

Now, onwards to the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku could just watch from the restraints in his own body as he moved. It was involuntary. He could see himself moving through his own eyes—see the white boundry lines getting closer and closer—but he couldn't stop. He couldn't force his steps to stop. He was going to walk himself out of the running. What was this?

It was obviously some kind of mind control Quirk. Figures that he's be competing against someone with an unknown, *insanely awesome*, Quirk.

How'd the Quirk activate? What had happened? All Izuku remembers is... well, they'd talked, hadn't they? So, it probably had something to do with the conversation. There had been something in their exchange that had swept over him and stole away his control, but what?

For a second, Izuku's mind flashes back to Ojiro's warning from before the match started.

"Don't answer him." His classmates had breathed out, just loud enough for Izuku to hear. His classmate's tail had been pressed loosely over his mouth, just enough pressure to silence his words to Shinsou. He hadn't really thought about it much at the time—or seen it as the warning it so clearly is now. *Don't answer.*

So, maybe it was answer based then; some hidden opening for the words to grab control of someone. Still... *how*?

The one thing he did know, was that it was voice activated; there was some sort of activation key in Shinsou's words, and in the targeted recipient's response. That didn't really narrow it down—there was so much to speaking that could've been the key. Tone, response, maybe even frequency or volume of Shinsou's voice; he'd have to keep that in mind.

The teen tries hard to pull himself out of the effects of the Quirk. It seems useless. Feels useless. His body is moving without thought. One step following another. He's moving on autopilot—the command of someone else.

At least his steps are slow; baby steps in the opposite direction he wants to be moving.

He has time to try and figure a way out of this. He has a chance still, even it feels pretty hopeless.

Quirks like these are tricky—like Shota's. How long does the effect work? Shota's stops as soon as he blinks—but there's no other way for Erasure to stop unless Shota gives up control, either willingly or forced. Is this Quirk like that? How long will it go? Is there a way to... knock himself out of it, or does Shinsou hold all the cards?

Izuku's eyes are focused in one place, staring straight ahead of himself. He doesn't even have control of where he looks—what he sees. He can only see the path before him—the path leading him to his defeat. To Shinsou's victory.

He sees All Might hiding in the tunnel doorway under the stadium seating, face peeking out from behind the edge. He looks nervous, face twisted with worry. Izuku has no idea what he looks like—how the Quirk had taken over his features as well, but it's probably not good if All Might looks as freaked out as he does.

It's honestly a strange sensation. He's trying so hard to move his body. To knock himself out of it. He tries to wiggle his fingers, or toes, or even just clench his teeth—anything—but nothing works. He has no control. His body is moving, following directions, but they aren't Izuku's directions.

His head feels full of fog.

It’s awful.

Uncomfortable.

But so cool.

This is a *cool* Quirk.

This would be so useful in the Pro Hero field—and Izuku fails to see how someone with a Quirk like this wound up in General Education. That’s where Shinsou’s from, isn’t it? How? This Quirk was incredible—and he’d definitely rave about it more when he wasn’t staring defeat in the eyes.

Izuku’s so busy trying to jolt his own body out of the hypnotic state that he hardly realizes that Oboro is now in front of him. If he could, he’d scoff. This ghost is gonna be the death of him—so much from not stepping foot in the arena unless Izuku was dying.

He can sort of hear the ghost talking. It feels like his ears are stuffed with cotton and the words all jumble together like he can’t focus his brain on processing them. Maybe his brain will only be able to respond to Shinsou’s voice? How deep does the brain washing Quirk go?

He has the urge to shake his head and rid himself of the Quirk related thoughts, but he can’t force the action. It’s jarring and annoying, but it is what it is when it comes to Quirks.

He’s getting closer to the boundry line now, one tiny step following another. Oboro is stood on the line, bottom lip pinched between his teeth. Worry drops in Izuku’s stomach like a brick—he was gonna lose. This was the end. He couldn’t go out like this. He couldn’t. He’d worked so hard to get here. He couldn’t let his friends, guardians and the ghost who’d put all his confidence into him, down.

Oboro is just watching him now, lips pressed into a straight line that curls the faintest bit downwards, and All Might is staring too, fingers tightening around the edge of the doorframe.

Come on... come on. He’s trying to force his thoughts back. To force his body to respond.

The line it right there—he's so close to losing.

Then a chill jolts up his spine. It’s... different. It’s familiar—like when

Oboro or any other ghost gets too close, but it's different too. He can't place his finger on why it's different, but it is. He knows Oboro isn't beside him, he's looking at the ghost.

He's not exactly sure why his eyes hazily drift towards where he'd last seen All Might, locking on the doorway like something was pulling his direction there—overpowering the Quirk he's under.

He feels his feet stumble below him, eyes landing on the doorway. It's not just All Might—in fact, he can't even really see All Might. There's a black, blurry mess. Glowing eyes lighting up the darkness. None of the eyes are particularly familiar except... he sees All Might's eyes there too, positioned exactly where the Pro had been standing the last time he'd glanced over.

What the hell was that?

He makes eye contact with some of the eyes, finally getting a little bit of control of where he can look. His head still refuses to move at his orders, but his eyes flicker about the doorway, catching on prying eyes. They're watching him. All of them are.

He feels the thrum of One for All in his fingers, fuzzy and foreign at the moment, like he's not supposed to have control of it, but does anyways. Like someone is using One for All to overpower the brainwashing Quirk he's still trapped in.

Someone activates the Quirk, but it's not... it's not entirely Izuku. He'd been trying since he realized he'd been tricked by his competitor—that he hadn't heeded Ojiro's warning. But his attempts had been in vain—it he couldn't so much as flick his gaze away from the pointed spot, there was no way he could've harnessed his Quirk.

He feels himself drop to his knees. Feels arms catching him. He feels himself being lowered, barely able to make out Oboro's light tufts of cloud-like hair, but his eyes are still in the door way. The hazy blackness fades away to a collection of figures—but he can't make them out. None are familiar, but they're all there. Eight of them; seven unfamiliar, and All Might, who's figure becomes more familiar as a long second stretches.

One for All is still buzzing in his fingers, desperate to be used. It almost burns. He can feel the gazes of those stood in the hallway on him, silent but prompting him in a strange way. He almost... feels them inside his head; inside his body.

It’s weird.

He’s still under the brainwashing Quirk. He knows he doesn’t have full control over his body—he hardly has control over his twitching fingers. Eye contact with the figures in the doorway is cut off by smoke clouding his vision—but no, that’s not smoke. He can breathe; his lungs feel fine. It’s thin and mist-like. Fog. It’s fog.

Fog?

Why would there be fog—

Oboro.

Everything clicks into place and before Izuku knows what he’s doing, one hand, the one active with One for All, is shooting out behind him and flicking, while the other, jostled out of his state by the whirl of wind from One for All, shoves the ghost off of him.

The fog had been blown away by the flick, and it disappears as soon as Oboro’s contact is brushed away just like every time they’d used Oboro’s Quirk thus far. Still, Izuku can’t help but feel a tad bit irritated—he'd given the ghost one rule, and that, miraculously, is the one rule Oboro had broken. Of course.

The ghost doesn’t seem offended in the slightest as he’s ripped away from being solid; in fact, he looks sheepish, and shamed, hands raising in a surrendering type of way, but Izuku’s gaze strays behind him to the tunnel doorway away, where all he sees is All Might’s face of surprised confusion. There’s a hint of pride in there too, and a tiny smile sweeps onto his mentor’s face and—

Oh right.

He’s in the middle of a battle.

He can hear Shinsou talking to him, but he’s not going to let himself be tricked again.

He’s still in bounds.

He’s still in this.

They haven’t called the battle off. He can see Cementoss and Midnight on their respective corners of the boundry lines. Both look ready to jump into action, but neither move. He can hear the audience, but it’s

almost muted to his ears. The clearest thing he hears is Shinsou's voice, and it prompts him on.

He won't lose.

He *can't* lose.

Nezu calls for a break directly after the Shinsou vs. Midoriya battle.

There's barely a second to be excited that Midoriya, his kid, had taken the victory, even though he's a bit bummed that Hitoshi's chances of making it into the Heroics Course just dwindled significantly. Still, Shota's seen what the kid can do, and he knows how hard this— having a Quirk like Hitoshi's— is, so he'll... he'll see what he can do. It's a waste for Hitoshi to stay where he is, especially with all the potential he has. The dual battles are just about as rigged as the Entrance Exam in the end, so Shota hopes there's something more he can do for Hitoshi.

Hizashi call out the break to the crowd as a half an hour intermission for the judges and staff to review the battle. Shota has never been happier to receive a message delaying something, because this, whatever the hell had just happened in that arena, needed to be discussed.

And that's how the dark-haired man finds himself seated at a table with the majority of the staff in charge of the festival. There're still some teachers supervising the students, and keeping an eye on the audience milling around, but anyone involved, teachers of the students and those who'd witnessed the oddity first hand, are gathered around.

The discussion is more or less bickering—not everyone had a good view from where they were positioned, not everyone had seen the battle unfold in depth or in detail, but everyone had witnessed the fog take over the battle boundaries.

"Did Midoriya cheat?" Shota swivels in his chair to glare at Snipe, but the gunman doesn't so much as glance in Shota's direction.

"No," the underground hero denies sharply, a snarl curling his lips. "That kid would rather *die* than cheat. I don't know what the hell happened out there, but Midoriya had nothing to do with it."

"That is true," Yagi shakes his head, arms crossing over his chest,

“Aizawa and I have both spent ample time with young Midoriya, and that boy would never cheat. Not willingly or intentionally. Whatever that was, it wasn’t caused by Midoriya.”

Shota lets his gaze flicker to Yagi across the table, not voicing anything else but silently thankful he’s got Midoriya’s back too. Hizashi is nodding at Shota’s side, clearly agreeing with the sentiment as well, but he doesn’t have quite as much experience with Midoriya to really add anything; but still, he’d spent just as much time with Izuku—frankly, anyone who’d taught the kid at all would see the prideful air about him.

He wants to learn and do things on his own. He wants to be able to do things alone. He absorbs information, and really takes critiques to heart—the kid is an honest hero in training, just as most of their students are. None of his 1-A students would cheat, and Shota would bet his life on it.

Besides, Shota can’t imagine the boy, Midoriya Izuku, who’d worked the hardest Shota had seen in ages, pushed himself to the absolute limits with a Quirk he’d just recently gotten, ever cheating, let alone at something as important as the Sports Festival. It’s illogical.

“Well, it wasn’t Shinsou’s doing,” Cementoss shakes his head, “the boy looked just as confused as anyone else. I didn’t see much, but I could see him.”

“If we’re going by that logic, Midoriya was on the ground.” Midnight cocked her head, shooting her fellow referee a hard look, “he was still under the effects of Shinsou’s Quirk. The kid couldn’t move—I mean, we all saw him break free of the hypnosis; that was one powerful flick. We all saw how it blew the fog away, but, forget about that for a second— are we not going to talk about the third person down there?”

The stunned huff in the woman’s voice as she speaks draws in Shota’s attention.

The man’s gaze lifts to her, as her narrowed eyes shooting around the room. She’d seen him too. It was one thing for Hizashi and Shota to see the third teenager, but it was another for Nemuri, who’d been down there on the ground, to have seen that unknown person as well.

“The *what*?” Vlad King blinks. There’s a moment of chilling silence, where no one knows what to say. The teachers are shocked, those who hadn’t seen the teenager down there too. Shota had thought everyone would’ve seen him—it was blatantly obvious.

“The third kid,” Midnight turns to him in surprise. Her confident expression crumbles slightly as he gaze surveys over the confused, surprised and nervous faces of their co-workers. “You didn’t... did anyone else see him?”

“We did,” Hizashi gestures to both himself and Shota. “Barely, I mean. I saw someone down there, sure, but... I couldn’t make out any details. It all happened so fast. I have no idea who that kid was—we were too far to really see. Did you see anything else, Nem?”

“No,” she shakes her head with a huff, “no more than you, apparently. I just got a glimpse and then the fog filled in and I could hardly see anything. It was just out of the corner of my eye, and before I could really look over, I couldn’t see anything inside the boundaries. I take it you two saw roughly the same thing?”

Hizashi nods slowly, blinking thoughtfully behind his tinted glasses. Shota just slumps a little more in his chair, glaring down at the edge of the table.

“Hold on. There was a third person down there and no one thought to intervene?” Snipe’s voice comes out icily, scanning around the table, “what was the point of having you two down there if you didn’t do anything about someone, a *stranger*, down there with the children?”

“You can’t honestly be blaming us,” Midnight glares hard at the gunman, “what would you have liked us to do? I barely saw the kid before the fog filled in, and Cementoss didn’t even see the kid. And, might I remind you, this whole thing went down in no more than five seconds.”

“Now, now,” Nezu chided with a wide smile, “settle down, teachers.”

The calm words of the principal instantly draw in everyone’s attention. Nezu is positioned at the head of the table, and until now, had been content to just watch the staff derail. His eyes shine with mirth, and his voice is light.

“I do agree that this is quite the predicament. I can’t say that I saw someone down there with the students either, but the thought in itself is rather worrisome. Three of my teachers witnessed it, a couple too many to brush off, no?” The rat taps at his chin thoughtfully. “Then again, the fog is quite hard to explain as well.”

“How could someone get in though?” Power Loader asks when no one says anything for a long moment. “We’ve doubled down on the

security after the USJ incident, and we've had Pros patrolling the area all day."

"Let's not forget that we have a full stadium of civilians," Hound Dog offers slowly, "it could've been any one of their Quirks as well. We know both Midoriya, and Shinsou's Quirks. And... as much as I don't want to say it, villains have gotten in once this year, who's to say they couldn't have again?"

"Yes, you do have a point," Nezu nods. "The festival has allowed access to the campus, and it's true that villains could use that to their advantage. It is the one day a year where Yuuei eases up on our security just a tad bit."

"If it was a villain..." Shota starts stiffly, unconvinced, "why did nothing happen? Neither boy was harmed. The fog lasted no more than five seconds. Seems illogical that villains would risk accessing the school a second time so close after the USJ to do *that*. Our security has been doubled, common knowledge. Pros are patrolling, as they do every year. That stadium is filled with first, second and third year students with powerful Quirks."

"That's true," Midnight's eyebrows furrow. "Villains can be pretty stupid, but I doubt any are that stupid. Aizawa's got a point; nothing did happen. If a villain managed to get past all our defenses undetected, why didn't they do something? The festival is broadcasted live, anything said or done would've blown up."

"Another good point," Nezu nods again. His smile has waned a little, but it's still wide and toothy on the rat's face. "Oh dear, this really is quite troublesome. Perhaps we should take a look at the camera footage of the battle, hm? I'm sure that will settle this, and answer all our questions!"

"Now he tells us," Snipe huffs under his breath.

It doesn't take long for a hologram screen to pop up in the middle of the table at Nezu's fiddling with a small remote. Some teachers shift to get a better view; Shota feels Hizashi's hand on the arm rest of his own chair, and then his husband and pushing in close to see better. Shota lets out a huff.

There are a couple angles; the screen split in sections of each angle. There was a camera right beneath the emcee booth where he and Hizashi had been, one off the side of where Midnight had been standing. There's an overhead angle, and a fourth that has a clean

view of the entire battle area from the side.

There's more cameras spread around, but these are the ones with the best views of this specific portion of the stadium. These are the angles that are broadcasted all the individual battles live.

They watch the battle play out as it had in real time. None of the videos have sound playing just because there's four videos playing at once, but they don't need the sound either way.

Shota leans forwards in interest as Izuku falls under the hypnotic Quirk, swiveling on his heels and slowly stepping away from Hitoshi.

The room is silent as they watch the kid move.

His steps are slow and sluggish, dragging as he goes. Watching now, Shota can see how the kid wobbles like he's really trying to fight the Quirk but to no avail. This just proves how much more valuable Hitoshi's Quirk is. Midoriya is strong—both when it comes to his Quirk, and mentally. This is no easy feat for Hitoshi, all the more reason that the kid should've been given an actual shot at Heroics admission, instead of a rigged entrance exam.

The underground hero forces his attention back onto the screen where, finally, Izuku's steps falter. He's frozen in place, wobbling just a little more, and when he does to take another step, the one right before he topples as the toe of his shoe catches on the concrete.

The teen stumbles to his knees, and... from these angles, it looks like he's down. Shota remembers the teen almost dangling, held up by something, *someone*, but here, it doesn't appear to be the case. It doesn't look completely natural, how Izuku goes down, but at the same time, it's not someone hovering in mid-air weird.

The next thing Shota notices, just before fog takes over the entirety of the dual arena, is that no one is there. Literally, no one. There's not another person in sight. Just... just Midoriya and Shinsou.

"What?" Hizashi breaths out at Shota's side, breath brushing along Shota's neck as he lets out a similar exhale. Midnight across the table looks as stumped as Shota feels.

No one. There was no one there but... he'd seen someone. Hizashi had seen someone. Nemuri had seen someone. Shota had seen someone holding Izuku.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Midnight blinks owlishly at the camera footage, “we saw someone. We all did—me, Yamada and Aizawa, I mean. How can we all see something that’s not there?”

“Well, there’s nothing there,” Vlad King gestures to the screen. “We have four different angles and there’s nothing on any of them. Nothing but the fog.”

“Maybe it was an illusion Quirk of some sort? What if—” Yagi continues, but Shota doesn’t care to listen in.

Shota ignores the conversation carrying on around him in favor of studying the replaying video. He leans in even closer to the screen as he watches the repeating footage. He narrows his eyes as he inspects it, nose wrinkling as he tries to ignore the conversation taking place. Arguing about this is useless, they’re never going to be able to agree on anything because no one knows what they really saw.

Some saw something, others didn’t.

The footage repeats again and this time... wait— “There,” the underground hero huffs gruffly, everyone looking towards him after his bout of silence in the conversation. Shota doesn’t look up at anyone as he points to a spot on the screen. “That. What’s that?”

It’s hardly noticeable. Tiny, compared to the rest of the screen. It looks like a little translucent ball hovering next to Midoriya. It glows faintly, is really hardly there, easily overlooked, but he’d spotted it, and the more he looks at it, the more it stands out.

“What?” Snipe leans forwards, “what are we looking at?”

“That spec by Midoriya?” Vlad questions, head cocking as he stares too. Everyone is looking where Shota is pointing. “Yeah, what is that?”

After further analysis, Shota determines that the little ball thing appears in all the camera's angles. It’s just barely there in the other three, and the one Shota is pointing at it the most visible, but it’s there. In most it’s just an outline of the edge of the sphere shape, but the original one he’s noticed is filled in with what appears to be a translucent white flash.

It’s odd.

“I’m not... sure,” Power Loader’s hands plant onto the table as he leans

close too, “a glitch in the footage maybe?”

“In all four videos, captured by four different cameras?” Hizashi questions with a raised eyebrow. “Seems unlikely.”

His husband’s eyes are narrowed, attention locked on the small spec in the footage right beside Shota’s finger. Everyone is glaring down at the spot in the video.

“Fascinating,” Nezu chirps, pushing himself up from his seat and climbing onto the table. He struts towards Shota, pausing in front of him to almost press his nose against the floating sphere. Shota leans away from the table a little as his boss’ tail swishes in interest right beside his face. “Truly curious,” the rodent nods cheerfully, “I have *no idea* how to explain that.”

“A glitch,” Power Loader offers a second time, rubbing at the back of his neck. He doesn’t look like he completely believes it, but what other explanation is there? “Technology glitches. Maybe the cameras caught something we didn’t.”

“Some of us did,” Midnight huffs. “I know what I saw, and it was... I don’t know. Familiar, maybe? The kid, and the fog. Just... I don’t know.”

“Yeah,” Hizashi nods, slumping back in his chair with a huff, “I don’t know either. I didn’t get a good look but... yeah, I agree. Familiar, now that you mention it. Just seeing it out of the corner of my eye, ya’dig? It’s like I’ve seen it before.”

“Aizawa,” Shota’s attention shoots up, and when it does, he comes face to face with Nezu. The rodent had never been one for personal space, enjoying sitting in his capture weapon whenever he has the chance, but this is a little close for comfort. “Didn’t something similar happen at the USJ?”

He feels everyone’s gaze on him.

Of course the rat would bring that up. It was in his police statement, sure, but being put on the spot like this? Nezu takes way too much pleasure in it.

Asui and Mineta, and a couple of his other students in proximity had reported seeing the clouds, but who was going to take the word of two traumatized first year students, a teacher who’d had his brains bashed into the concrete and a tiny collection of students who *thought* they

saw some *smoke or something*.

“Not like this,” Shota drawls out, narrowing his eyes and glaring at the rodent principal over his nose. “It was similar, yeah. The fog, at least. I don’t know what I saw after I was injured; I don’t trust my own judgment after the head wound, but my students spoke of similar images to what happened today.”

“Asui and Mineta told me they thought it was a villain’s Quirk,” Hizashi adds, distraught. “A villain who was helping them escape the League of Villains, and it seems farfetched, I know— a villain turning in the middle of a fight— but we can’t discredit them. None of us were there. And we do know all our students, Aizawa’s, and Thirteen’s Quirks.”

“So there was a villain here,” Vlad King’s voice drops low. Tone serious and tense. No one makes a sound as the words sink in. As the insinuation that a villain had once again made their way on campus settled over them like a suffocating blanket.

“Or,” Nezu tuts, walking along the edge of the table, clearly done with Shota, “a vigilante, perhaps? Nothing harmed our students today, and if the word of Aizawa and those students present during the attack on the USJ is correct, this fog Quirk only aided them. A villain would do no such thing, certainly not if they were working with the League of Villains.”

“So we’re just going to discredit this like it didn’t even happen?” Yagi’s head is cocked, confusion lacing his voice, “Sir, I don’t think—”

“No,” Nezu beams, hands interlocked over the small of his back, “certainly not. I won’t say this is a threat, but I also won’t say this *isn’t* a threat. We hardly know a thing; the only thing we can all clearly agree on is the fact that the fog was unusual and cause for concern. As of now, I highly doubt anything will happen during the festival. The battle between Midoriya and Shinsou continued as normal after the fog cleared. It will cause an uproar should we cancel the event, especially now that it’s almost finished.”

“Is it worth putting our students in danger to avoid an uproar?” Hound Dog frowns.

“I truly do not think whatever caused the fog has any intention of harming the students. There have been ample times that something could’ve happened. Five full seconds where no one moved; more than enough time to make a move, yet nothing happened.” Nezu tells them

easily, “I’ll admit, I’m just as curious as you all, intrigued by this—it certainly is some food for thought, isn’t it?— but I don’t believe there’s any danger as of current.”

The teachers all share a glance as the principal pauses at the edge of the table by the seat he’d started in, “that said, I want everyone in this room on high alert. Should another incident, such as the one to happen while Midoriya and Shinsou were battling, occur, we’ll shut it down. We know what we’re looking for now, I don’t want to see anyone hesitate should that fog appear a second time today.”

His tone is almost icy in that way Nezu can only do. It’s a drastic contrast to the charming smile he sends them when he swivels on his heels to make fleeting eye contact with each and every teacher seated at the table.

No one dares say anything. Not when Nezu’s tone leaves no room for argument.

“Good!” The rat chirps after a long second of awkward silence, tone back to the light, playfulness it had been previously. “Now, that brings us to the final aspect of this meeting. Can we consider Midoriya’s win fair?”

There’s a second of uncertain silence.

“We saw his win,” Yagi clears his throat after breaking the silence. “It’s not like they fought in the fog, neither boy moved until it was cleared. It’s all on film. Young Midoriya used his Quirk to shock himself out of the hypnotic state his opponent put him in. That’s fair. That’s a win.”

“Yes, but you like the kid,” Vlad King reminds with a frown. “We don’t know that for sure.”

“Yeah, I agree. We don’t know what happened during those five seconds where we couldn’t see anything.” Snipe blinks slowly, “anything could’ve happened.”

“We see exactly where Midoriya went down,” Shota huffs out, nodding his chin towards where the screen in the center of the table is still playing the reruns of the battle. It’s the part where the green-haired teen is falling to his knees, “and when the fog clears, Midoriya hasn’t moved at all beside his arms. He’s completely in bounds.”

“How did he manage to use his Quirk?” Midnight questions with a

quirked eyebrow. She leans her elbow on the table, chin supported in her palm, watching the screen like it might tell her the answer itself.

“Sheer power of will?” Hizashi huffs a light laugh, “Midoriya’s hard headed, you could see him struggling against the Quirk. All he needed was a little bit of give to break himself out of it, and we see that on film too. If anyone can do it, it would be Midoriya.”

“Young Midoriya is quite head strong,” Yagi shrugs helplessly in agreement.

“Wouldn’t it be fair to have a rematch?”

“A rematch won’t change the outcome,” Shota shakes his head with a sigh. It sucks to say, but Shota also knows that he doesn't want Shinsou losing twice. He has high expecations for the teen, and he knows he's more than capable, but the win is in the video, and Shota knows how Izuku processes Quirks. It's not worth forcing Hitoshi into a second fight where his outsome is a heartbreaking loss; he's made great progress, but he's just... not quite up to par with his components just yet. “Shinsou’s main advantage in this battle was that initial element of surprise. That’s how he got one over on Midoriya, but Midoriya knows his Quirk now. He knows how to avoid it. It’s a losing fight, and frankly, it would just be cruel to make Shinsou compete twice when he only had an advantage the first time around.”

“Yes,” Nezu lets out a light huff, that small amused smile still on his lips, “I agree. We won’t host a rematch, but we could disqualify both on account that the match could be seen as invalid considering those five seconds of lost time.”

“That seems unfair to both,” Midnight frowns thoughtfully, “neither boy did anything wrong, and we all know what disqualifications’ll do to them. Between the spectators in the crowd, the media vultures and their classmates—we might as well paint targets on their backs that say *cheater*. Midoriya did win in the end, Shinsou did end up outside of the boundaries. Aizawa was right, even if we didn’t really see anything for those five seconds, neither one moved. We can analyze these videos as much as we want, it won’t change what’s in front of us.”

“Alright then,” Nezu puffs out his chest a little, teeth baring in a smile, “we’ll continue as is. Midoriya will be moving on as normal. Any objections?”

No one bothers to speak.

“Wonderful!” the rat chirped with a clap of his hands, “that concludes this meeting; and perfectly timed as well, our half an hour intermission is just about over. Back to your posts, please. We have a Sports Festival to finish!”

After that half hour intermission break, the Sports Festival carries on without any other interruptions. Izuku’s not quite sure what to think. He knows everyone had seen the fog. His and Shinsou’s battle had been on repeat in Recovery Girl’s office. His fingers had shattered again and should he be allowed to compete still, he needed to be in good shape to do so.

The fog was so obviously clear. It was there, but no one was saying anything. No one mentioned it. He was so confused.

He still doesn’t know what possessed Oboro to ignore him completely and join him. He doesn’t know why his friend reached out to touch him, or even where the ghost was now.

He’s not sure if he’s glad he doesn’t see him, or upset he’s gone. All he knows is one second, he’s glaring, turning away from the ghost and being swept up with the battle at hand now that he had his re-found freedom back, and the next, when he has a second to think, the ghost is gone.

He’s not sure what he’s feeling when it comes to Oboro. The ghost doesn’t just do things—especially not things that could get Izuku in trouble. He can’t help but wonder why the ghost touched him when the risk of it was so blatantly obvious.

His Quirk had been seen on *live television*. How was he going to explain that? How was Yuuei going to explain that? He didn’t know, and only a very tiny part of him actually wanted to find out. He didn’t want to talk about it. He didn’t want it brought up. He didn’t want anyone to know it existed, his natural Quirk. Nothing good ever came from people knowing about it.

It’s a long half an hour as Izuku waits for the festival to continue. He knows they’re talking about him—about the battle between him and Shinsou—about the *fog*.

He’s still upset.

He’s worried.

He's a little frustrated, and there's a strange inkling of defeat in his lungs that doesn't make sense because he'd won. He'd won against Shinsou. But he knows that can all be dashed away at the drop of a hat.

Sure, they'd let him finish the battle—he'd won. He'd managed to get Shinsou out of bounds, but was he going to get in trouble? Was the fight valid? Would they think he *cheated*?

He waits anxiously as that half an hour intermission ticks on, minutes crawling along at snail's speed. He's not sure his heart settles the whole time, and he has half a mind to check in with Recovery Girl for a heart attack, or something.

He doesn't, can't bring himself around to it. All he does is stare at his own fingers and wait.

What if he gets kicked out of school for this?

What if he gets disqualified? What if he gets *Shinsou* disqualified?

What if his new guardians think he's a cheater?

Would they still keep him?

What will he do if he gets shipped off to some foster home, or group home? What then?

He doesn't think his teachers would do that—but then again, he didn't think his mom would just walk out on him without a word either. He's not sure he'd be able to hand the two men just... giving up on him. That would be his breaking point. He can't even imagine it—he'd only lived with them for so long, but he's dependent on it. On them. It's been so long since he'd... felt like this.

Thankfully there's not much time to stress over it all, because before he knows it, the festival is under swing again, and the next battle pair is up, and no one's said anything about a disqualification, and he can finally take a *breath*.

He can hardly pay attention to the next couple rounds—who wins and who loses. All he really needs to think about is who he's fighting next and that's Todoroki.

He feels bad that he didn't give his friend's matches as much attention as he should've feeling the worst about not really seeing Ochako's

battle against Kacchan.

He's a little sad she lost, but at the same time, he knows how powerful Kacchan is. She put up a good fight, and she should be proud. He'll tell her that when he sees her next.

He waits patiently to see if a teacher comes to find him to tell him he's disqualified, or that he was expelled for being caught cheating, but no one comes.

Before he knows it, he's stood in the tunnel that'll lead him towards his next battle.

He's not expecting to have a run in with the Number Two Hero in said tunnel, and honestly, it irks him. He's already stressed, and tired, and he'd been trying to put all his attention into this battle, but he's got his two guardians spectating, and a missing ghost, and he really doesn't want to deal with the guy.

He honestly hates the short conversation with the Pro. As Izuku makes his way towards the other end of the tunnel, content to not give Endeavor the time of day, the Pro's voice stops him; tells Izuku to do his best not to give Shoto a disgraceful match. Before Izuku can leave, can end the conversation he didn't even want to have in the first place, Izuku tells Endeavor that he isn't All Might and Shoto isn't him. He feels bad for his classmate.

He really doesn't mean to get hurt.

He just... he wants Todoroki to be himself. He wants Todoroki to own his powers—the ice side and the flaming side. They're both his Quirks, despite being inherited. He wants his classmate to see how useful his Quirk can be, how it doesn't have to be used like his father uses his own flames.

And if he gets beat, if he loses in the long run, then so be it. Because he'd helped Todoroki. And hopefully he'll start to see the dual Quirked teen striving to be the best with both his icy side and his flaming side.

He'd hated seeing Todoroki sad.

Izuku wakes up in the infirmary. He's not sure how much time has passed. A couple hours, he's sure.

He feels drowsy, like his head is full of cotton wool. His mouth feels

dry, and his body hurts. Aches. Ouch.

“You with us, Kiddo?” Izuku lets his head lull in the direction of the voice, giving a faint nod. The voice is familiar, but for a second, Izuku can’t place it with his mind everywhere. “You had us real worried, Darlin’, but man was that fight amazing.”

“Don’t encourage him,” another voice scoffs, older and weathered, “the men in this boy’s life, I swear. It’s like a fight club around here. Now, how are you feeling, Dearie?”

“Ouch,” Izuku tells the second voice unhelpfully, with prompts a deep snort of laughter from Izuku’s other side. It belongs to neither of the first two voices. Izuku likes the sound, even if it sounds like the voice is laughing at him.

“That’s helpful, Problem Child.”

Problem Child?

Oh. He knows who’s here now.

“Shooota,” Izuku lulls his head in Shota’s direction, “you’re here.”

And if he’s here then... Izuku’s head angles back to the other side, “’zashi. It’s you, you’re here.”

“Hey, Izu,” Hizashi leans closer to him, brushing Izuku’s bangs out of his face. His hand settles on the side of his head for a second, and in his hazy, drug filled mind, the only option is to press in closer. “You’re so high it’s not even funny, Listener. You’re just the cutest.”

“’m not,” Izuku huffs out, hardly aware of how he’s pressing against his guardian’s hand.

“He’s like a cat,” comes Shota’s own voice, soft and slow and comforting. Izuku feels the dark-haired hero’s hand on his forearm. It’s nice—calloused from years of handling the capture weapon, but there’s a strange, out of place softness too.

“I hurt,” Izuku tells them numbly, mind lagging behind. He feels groggy. He hopes he comes out of this soon, he clearly has very little brain to mouth filter, and that not something someone in his position can bear to lose.

“Should he be hurting?” Shota questions, and Izuku can almost hear

concern in his voice.

“You did just wake up from surgery, dear. Does it hurt, or is it just a bit uncomfy?”

His brain stutters, thinks it through before he lifts his head and forces his eyes fully open, “uncomfy.”

“That’s as I expected,” the woman tuts softly. “He’s still coming out of the pain medication I gave him when he first arrived, but he should start coming around soon. Once he’s functioning, he’ll be good to go so long as you two keep an eye on him, and he gets lots of rest this weekend before school. No training, no physical activity, nothing of the sort, alright?”

“We’ll keep an eye on him,” Hizashi promises.

“Trust me, the kid won’t be doing anything until he’s properly healed. If he’s not going to heed your warnings, I will.”

He doesn’t like the sound of that, but he’ll worry about that later.

“W-who, uhm, who won...?” His voice comes out rougher than he thought it would; voice dry like his mouth and throat felt.

“Overall, or the top three?”

“Both?” Izuku cocks his head. “Was... was it Kacchan? K-Kacchan is strong, I knew he could do it.”

“Yes,” Shota’s lets out a fond huff. “Katsuki did win. He placed first, followed by Todoroki and the Tokoyami.”

“Good,” Izuku breaths out lightly, his brain feeling like mush, “I’m glad. T-Todoroki deserves it too; used his fire side an’ everything. So strong. And... and Tokoyami too. Good job.”

“You did well too,” Hizashi tells him, “We’re very proud, Izuku. You fought hard, and you made it far. Good job, Izuku too.”

We’re very proud.

Good job, Izuku.

Man, when was the last time he heard that?

“Awh, baby,” Izuku hears, and then there’s a hand brushing under his

eyes, and the tone is so soft, and sweet, and unfamiliar, but so appreciated, “don’t cry, sweetheart, it’s alright.”

He hadn’t realized he was tearing up, and he’s not even sure why.

Because he hasn’t felt like this in so, so long.

Because he’s hurt, and drugged up, and he’d lost.

Because he feels so nice, and protected and soft and these two men are sitting at his bedside, and calling him nice things and saying *good job* and *we’re proud* and... oh, wow, why can’t he stop crying?

The arm he reaches up to wipe his face with, his dominant one, sends a sharp spark of pain through his arm whole arm. He knows he lets out a his, and the violent wince makes his head spin. He feels Shota’s gentle hand press it back down to the bed, and instead the dark-haired hero wipes away his tears.

“Hush, Problem Child, try to sleep a little more, you’re getting yourself worked up.”

And he does, because he’s so tired, and he’s warm, and safe and this is... it’s so *nice*.

Izuku doesn’t remember his first time waking up in the infirmary.

He wakes up the second time to his guardians conversing quietly, and Recovery Girl working at her desk. Shota and Hizashi look tired, worn out after a long day, and they look a little stressed too.

He doesn’t remember a lot of that either to be fair, but he remembers more than he does about the supposed first time he woke up. He’s a little fearful to ask if he’d done anything strange under the influence, but he really doesn’t want to know the answer.

He doesn’t remember getting loaded up into the car, or getting helped into the apartment. He does remember being ambushed by cats—both Shota and Hizashi trying to shoo them away, but to no avail.

How he ends up with all three sprawled on his bed, he’s not sure.

He remembers catching Oboro’s eyes as he’s helped into the guest bed by Shota. As Hizashi grabs him a water bottle from the fridge in case he gets thirsty in the night. He remembers the sad look, and the wince when all Izuku can make himself do is stare into the ghost’s eyes.

Then he... well, he falls asleep.

That following morning, Izuku knows what he needs to do. He doesn't wake up to the ghost in his room. He doesn't even see the ghost until he makes his way into the main living space of the apartment where Shota and Hizashi are sitting together watching some English film.

He spots Oboro sitting on the floor in the corner of the room, watching the TV, but not at the same time. He doesn't even seem to notice Izuku until the teen clears his throat to get everyone's attention.

"Do you guys mind if I go visit a friend today?" Izuku questions with a light smile.

"That depends," Shota replies without looking up from the movie, "how are you feeling?"

"Better," Izuku tells him honestly. "My arm hurts a bit, I guess, but other than that, I'm feeling fine now."

"I don't mind then, eat something for lunch before you take off, and be back by dinner." Shota shrugs, finally looking up at Izuku before glancing over at Hizashi who's tucked under his arm, "Anything to add, 'zashi?"

"Did you want me to drive you?"

"Oh, uh, no thank you," Izuku gives a cheerful smile, "I'm fine. I want to get some fresh air on the walk."

"Alright," Hizashi gives him a light smile, "you've got our numbers and you know how to find your way back home, right?"

"Yes," Izuku nods, and it's mostly the truth. He has their numbers, and he has a ghost who'll be able to find his way back. The ghost in question is watching Izuku with an uncertain look. Oboro startles when Izuku subtly gestures him to follow.

"Sounds good then, text us if you need us."

"Sure!" Izuku chirps, turning on his heels to leave the room, "will do!"

"Oh, and Problem Child?" Izuku freezes in the doorway at Shota's gruff voice, "try'n stay out of trouble, yeah?"

"I'll try," Izuku laughs. "See ya later!"

He grabs something quick to eat from the kitchen before taking his leave. He feels the ghost following behind him, silent but there. He's never spent any time with Oboro where the ghost was this quiet. It makes Izuku feel uneasy.

"Who are you going to visit?" Oboro asks awkwardly at Izuku's side, clearly unsure why he'd been invited along.

Izuku glares over at the ghost before letting out a heavy sigh, "you, ya block head. We need to talk."

Izuku wasn't sure Oboro's pale complexion could turn and paler, but it certainly does. Huh.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately it'll probably be a while before Shota and Hizashi find out about Oboro because there's still a lot I wanna do where they don't know. Apologies for that, I'm sorry to get people's hopes up!

We were so close, rip to camera angles and ghosts not appearing on camera! The cat was almost out of the bag.

Also, just as a warning, most of the stuff about ghosts that'll be in this fic comes from *The Umbrella Academy*, a TV show called *Ghosts*, and the YouTubers *Sam and Colby* who do ghost hunting and stuff. I make some of it up too because the power has gone to my head, but it's mostly a mix of a little bit of everything that I like and think is cool, so hopefully it all makes sense.

Anyways, as always thanks for reading and interacting with this fic! Always amazing to see, and I genuinely love reading your guy's comments! Thank you!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! This is not me posting minutes before I go to work because I definitely have time management!
>
> Also! Guys, we got some fan art for this fic! I'm so happy! This lovely art was made by squishypeanut on AO3 and waywardfizzles on Tumblr! Drop a like on our favorite Emotional Support Ghost over there! If anyone else wants to make this fic fanart too, I'll be happy to add it to the fic to be seen if you give me a link! I'm boww-tiez on Tumblr, but you can leave it in the comments too!
>
> Anywho! On with the fic before I'm late for work!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The teen isn't really sure what possessed the ghost to do as he'd done. Why had he completely ignored him and joined him down in the arena anyways? When Izuku had explicitly told him not to. They'd literally had that conversation just before the events started—surly Oboro couldn't have forgotten that?

Sure, he'd given the ghost an okay to do so, *but* that had only been if Izuku was dying.

If he was sitting on death's doorstep, and the only thing that could've saved him was Oboro—which he knew wouldn't happen. Not at the Sports Festival. Not surrounded by his friends, and teachers, and countless Pro Heroes on patrol or simply just watching the next generation of Heroes perform to their fullest.

No one had died at the Sports Festival—sure, there had been some fatal blows and *close calls*, but Recovery Girl was always on top of any injuries, so despite how dangerous the festival well and truly is, no one had died. Oboro knew that, so why'd he come back on his word?

The ghost trails silently behind Izuku as the teen walks down the street. It's mid-day, so the streets are busy. He doesn't really know the neighborhood, but he knows it well enough considering it's relatively close to the school. He'd walked through it once or twice, but never really looked around or explored.

But now was as good of time as any, and this wasn't a conversation he could have on the streets with people walking past—and he certainly couldn't have it at his guardian's apartment. Not when they were home, and Izuku really doesn't think they should put this conversation off. They were still putting off the '*who are you really?*' conversation, but Izuku is waiting for Oboro to take the first step with that one.

He still hasn't worked up the nerve to ask his guardians—or, would he be asking his teachers?— what happened with the fog. He's still waiting for the other shoe to drop. Surely something has to be said about the fog that had pooled into the sectioned off battle arena. That's not normal. And Izuku isn't sure how he could explain it if he tried.

He can't tell someone else about his Quirk-not-Quirk. He can't lose someone else because he's weird. Because he's different. He's afraid. If this had chased away his own parents, the ones whose sole responsibility is to take care of him, what will it do to the two men who *don't* have obligations to care for Izuku?

He doesn't want to find out.

The teen walks slowly, passes shops and stores. There're a couple different apartment buildings spread around, it's almost neighborhoodlike, but at the same time, it's not open or happy like the neighborhood he grew up in. It's clear this is the type of neighborhood where people tended to keep to themselves—which makes sense considering Shota's position as an underground hero.

The less attention there, the better.

Izuku almost remembers walking around here with his Sensei the night he'd found him on the streets. It's distant, truthfully, that whole night is pretty distant, but he's got faint memories. It had been a long walk considering the trains weren't running at that hour, nor was any other public transit.

Which is how Izuku finds his way to a small, secluded playground. It's old, weathered down. Faded metal and chipped paint. It's not one of those fancy new playgrounds you see in community-based neighborhoods, or at schools where small children attend these days; with tubes and bridges connecting dozens of slides and activity toys—it's nothing but a single metal slide, a swing set, an old, squeaky merry-go-round and a see-saw.

The park is devoid of anyone, and by the look of the quality, it's

probably for good reason. There's no cushioning under the equipment; sand or woodchips, or even gravel, just grass that's on the way to being overgrown.

He's not sure even his mother would've let him play where when he was little, and that's saying something.

Still, it seems perfect for this, and honestly, Izuku's a bit sore from walking.

So, he makes his way towards the swing set, plopping down on one of the swings and using his toes to kick off a smooth, swaying motion. Oboro is stood a foot or so away, watching with a pinched expression. It looks like he'd just bitten a wedge of lemon, or something as equally sour and bitter.

He looks like he doesn't know what to say or do; like he suddenly doesn't know how to act around Izuku despite their month of friendship and the fact that Oboro is probably the closest friend he's ever had.

"You coming?" Izuku cocks his head to the side, gesturing to the remaining swing at his side.

Oboro seems to survey over Izuku for a second before letting out a breath through his nose and moving cautiously to settle on the swing. It doesn't move an inch—the chains holding it don't rattle like when Izuku had sat down. Honestly, the swing would be completely still if it wasn't for the breeze sweeping over it.

Oboro seems to take that in stride, lifting his feet up so they hover above the ground instead of how Izuku is guiding himself with his toes. The ghost hands over full control to the gentle, swaying breeze.

They sit in silence for a second, Izuku swinging faintly, and Oboro staring blankly ahead of himself.

"I haven't really seen you since yesterday," Izuku mutters quietly, staring down at where his toe is digging into the grass instead of glancing at his friend. "Or, talked, I guess. You were around, but you weren't... *there*."

"I didn't think you'd want to see me," Oboro returns slowly. His hands are grasping tightly at the chains on either side of him, and he looks so uncomfortable it makes Izuku want to frown. "You were... I did it again, Izuku. I fucked it up again. I messed up, and I could've... I

could've ruined everything this time."

Izuku choses to remain silent at the ghost's side. Oboro isn't even looking at him, just glaring straight ahead like the slide in front of them had personally done him wrong. He wants to question what the ghost means, but knows if he keeps quiet, Oboro might just tell him without prompting. Silences like these do weird things to people.

"I don't know how *not* to screw it all up," the ghost heaves out, "I just... I try not to do anything, and it should be easy, y'know? I've done nothin' for *years*—but when it comes to you... I don't know. I just... I— You could've gotten disqualified, or they could've thought you were cheating, or, hell, you could've been expelled because of me."

The ghost lets out a groan that comes out more like a growl, nose wrinkling in frustration.

"You used your Quirk."

"I didn't *mean* to," Oboro stressed the word out. "Really, that was... it was an accident. I had no intention of using it, Izuku, and you've gotta believe me. I'd never intentionally do that to you. I would... I'd never. You've gotta know that."

"I know." And he does.

Which is why he's so confused why it actually *happened*.

"It... it just happened," the ghost whines out like it doesn't make sense to him either. It's almost like Oboro had read Izuku's mind, because he's pretty sure he didn't say his thoughts aloud. "I was just... I don't know. I was scared. I was scared, and I know you said that I shouldn't intervene unless you were dying, and I know, I *know* you weren't. You weren't dying; you were safe. I know that, but I just..."

Oboro's voice tapers off, and now the ghost is staring down at his own lap.

"Just... what?" Izuku inquires softly.

"You had this look in your eyes," Oboro tells him just as quietly. "It was the Quirk. Hitoshi's Quirk. Your eyes just... they glazed over, y'know?"

Once again, Izuku waits while the ghost processes through his

thoughts.

“I didn’t mean to go down there, you told me not to. I know. I just. I blinked, and then I was there—but I wasn’t going to do anything. I just... I was talking to you. And I could see your eyes, and your stiff movements, but I made sure we didn’t touch. Every step you took, I took one back. I know you didn’t want any help, but I thought maybe... maybe I could help without helping, you know?”

“That’s still helping,” Izuku cocks an eyebrow, and Oboro lets out a light, sad laugh.

“I know. Sorry. I wasn’t... I wasn't thinking, I guess. It’s just you worked so hard to get there, and I know—*I know* Hitoshi did too, but I’m biased towards you. I know everything you’ve done to make it this far, and to go out like that—to lose it all over a question?”

“It was fair,” Izuku tells the ghost, even though he knows Oboro already knows that as well. “I wasn’t expecting it, sure, but he did use his Quirk fairly. He showed off what he was capable of, and it was clever. He’ll make a good hero one day, if that’s what he’s going for.”

“You’re too good, you know that?” Oboro huffs out with another light laugh. It’s not much brighter than the first, but there’s also not as much sadness hidden beneath it. “You’ll make a good hero too, Izu.”

Izuku glances over to his side, seeing Oboro’s head lifted just enough so they can catch each other’s gazes. He can’t help the light smile at the ghost’s words, but he’s quick to shake it off, “we’re getting off topic.”

“Sorry,” comes Oboro’s whisper of a reply.

Despite Izuku’s accusation, neither continues for a second. It’s Oboro who breaks the silence in the end, and just barely at that. If it wasn’t so quiet here, he’s not sure he would’ve heard the ghost at all. “Why aren’t you angry at me?”

“What?” Izuku’s caught off guard, looking up from his red sneakers abruptly, gaze locking on the ghost at his side.

Oboro doesn’t look up, keeps staring ahead of himself. His fingers tense around the chain again, the ghostly pale of his skin fading out to an almost translucent white. “Why aren’t you upset?”

“I... was,” Izuku can’t lie to the ghost, even if the admission has

Oboro's face crumpling and body slumping in defeat. "In the moment, I definitely was. I... I pushed you away, didn't I? I didn't mean to be so harsh, but I panicked, y'know? I just didn't... I was wondering why. We'd talked about it before the festival started and I was clear when I told you I wanted to do it alone—that I had to do it alone. I was upset, and angry because it felt like you... I don't know, like you ignored me completely."

"I didn't mean to," the ghost croaked out, voice barely above a whisper. Izuku's not sure he'd heard the ghost sound so wrecked. "I know what I did was wrong, and I... I *really* didn't mean to."

"I know," Izuku frowns, digging his heel into the grass to push off and start swinging again. He sways twice, head thrown back to stare up at the sky, "that's why I'm not angry or upset anymore. I'm just... I'm trying to understand."

Oboro is silent at his side, one hand on the chain, and the other picking at the edge of his Yuuei blazer jacket. He doesn't look like he wants to say anything else, but Izuku's not content. "Why did you really come down when you knew I didn't want you down there with me? Why... why did Shinsou's Quirk affect you? What made you *move*?"

He can't be upset at the concept that Oboro moved before he knew what he was doing. It was a hero trait. That was exactly how Izuku caught All Might's attention—having a hero's heart and mindset. That inability to look the other way. He'd be a hypocrite if he was upset Oboro had the same urge when looking at something he deemed dangerous—

The question was, why was it dangerous? Why'd he move? What went through his head when watching that battle that prompted him into action?

The ghost is quiet for another long second before he finally blows out a slow exhale. "I've only seen the look that you had in your eyes, that glazed over, unseeing stare, once before. It... I don't know, I guess it messed with me. I... I didn't like it. Not on you."

Izuku opens his mouth to push for more, desperate to understand, but Oboro continues before he can, "and... and that one time I'd seen it was... was on *myself*. Standing o-over... after I..." an audible swallow as Oboro arches forwards, elbows on his knees and head hanging, "your eyes looked dead, Izuku."

And everything clicks into place.

Dread drops over Izuku's head like a block of ice that shatters into a million little pieces as the words sink in. Oboro, this dead teenager, had looked at Izuku during that battle and seen images himself after he'd passed away in Izuku. The thought swirls in his stomach and makes him feel physically sick.

He hadn't known what he was expecting, but it wasn't that. He never would've thought that. Would never want to think that, let alone have it actually happen.

He feels awful for his friend, and everything he'd gone through, even though Izuku doesn't know the bare minimum of it. He can't imagine looking at someone— Kacchan, or Tsu, or Shota and Hizashi or, hell, even Oboro— and seeing what he associated death with.

His stomach gives a churn at the dark image—at the fear swirling that's probably not even half of what Oboro had felt in the moment as he'd come back on his word and found himself staring Izuku's brainwashed gaze in the eyes.

This time it's Izuku who moves without thought.

He's up off the swing, the chains clinking as they're tossed backwards from his quick movements.

One second, he's sitting on the swing, and the next he's grabbing Oboro's arm, and tugging him as he drops to his knees— and they're touching again—his fingers curl around a solid arm, and all he can think to do is comfort.

There's a tiny part of him ecstatic that they can touch like this, as easily as they are, but the bigger part of his brain knows it's just because he's desperate to comfort Oboro. He's desperate to squash down that fear because Izuku is fine.

Oboro slides off the swing and onto his knees too, clearly not expecting the touch or weight of Izuku barreling into him and locking onto his frame, and when they're the same level, on their knees in the grass, Izuku tugs the ghost into a hug.

He pulls Oboro in close, arms encircling around the ghost's neck. He pressed his face in close, eyes squeezing shut as his nose brushes against solid skin. Solid skin. Because Oboro is solid.

Oboro is slack in his arms for a second—not longer than a second—before he's wrapping his arms around Izuku's midsection and squeezing just as desperately. His own face shoves in close and he lets out a shuttering breath as they sit there on their knees in front of the swaying swings, squeezing each other.

Izuku had never hugged a ghost—never gotten close enough to one to allow it. Never thought he would've initiated it in the first place, but this feels right. There's no chill of it, just a familiar warmth of another body. It's not like hugging someone living, not really, but it's also not like hugging air.

He feels the ghost breathing against him, he feels Oboro tightening his hold desperately; and all Izuku can do it return the favor.

He's not sure how long they sit there together, wrapped in an embrace Izuku had never thought would be possible. He hadn't known he'd needed the hug as much as Oboro clearly did.

Oboro doesn't move against him, but he thinks the ghost might be crying. His breaths come out uneven, heavy and forced. If he needed to breath to survive, Izuku would be pulling away and demanding the ghost try to calm down; but Oboro isn't alive, and the green-haired teen thinks the ghost wouldn't take to kindly to him pulling away yet.

"I haven't..." Oboro's voice definitely sounds like he'd been crying, "it's been... I've missed h-hugs."

His words are accompanied by Oboro burying his own nose in Izuku's shoulder, tightening his grip. It breaks Izuku's heart to hear—but he'd... he'd expected it. Oboro was dead. Oboro phased through ninety-nine percent of, well, *everything*; but that didn't mean it didn't shatter his heart.

"I'm sorry," Izuku whispers out, unsure what he's apologizing for. He's crying too, he realizes. This isn't his pain, or his trauma, but this is *his* friend, and he'll hurt for him. With him.

Truthfully, he hadn't seen much emotion from the ghost. Not such raw emotion like this—not since the USJ where Oboro had fought his hardest to help Aizawa-Sensei. Oboro had always seemed so chipper—content being a ghost, and sure there were times he looked sad, or defeated, but never like this. He'd never really thought about how being dead would make a ghost feel.

To be dead, someone would've had to die and there's... there's very

few pleasant ways to go. And something about this, about Oboro's age, and his appearance now, tells Izuku that Oboro probably didn't get some peaceful 'died in his sleep' ending. The green-haired teen has a feeling it's traumatic all around.

Izuku shifts slightly, unsure how long they'd been kneeled in each other's embraces.

"Not yet," Oboro's voice is hardly above a whisper, grip tightening. "Please... please don't let go yet."

"I won't," Izuku promises, wincing as he shifts again, "but I do need to move. Some of us have poor blood circulation that's currently not circulating. My legs are numb; I'm going to have awful pins and needles when I stand up again."

"If you're talkin' poor circulation, I've got you beat. Nonexistent is worse than poor," the exhale the ghost releases is basically just a breathy laugh.

"Yeah, well," Izuku scoffs, "only one of us actually *needs* the circulation that they don't have, so technically *I* have *you* beat."

"Yeah, alright. That's fair enough." Satisfied with the huffy reply from the green-haired teen, Oboro lets Izuku go just enough for the teen to shift so he's sitting on his butt with his one leg stretched out and the other tucked under himself.

It's not perfect, but it's better.

They still have multiple points of contact, but the hug has relaxed slightly. There's enough give for Izuku to wriggle around in an attempt to get his blood moving, but not enough to pull away unless he physically tore himself away, which he wouldn't.

"I think we need to start working more on this Quirk," Izuku tells the ghost after a second of silence. The breeze ruffles through his curls, and one of the swings behind him bumps into his back, but he's not bothered. "This... forced emotional activation is only going to hurt us at some point—nothing to bad happened this time, as far as I know, but that won't always be the case. We need to learn this Quirk, and get it under control before we mess something up."

"Okay," Oboro agrees. "I really am sorry. I just... I was trying to catch you when you stumbled, and I didn't, well, I didn't think I actually *would*. It's always iffy, you know that. I try to touch you all the time,

but most of the time you block it, or, or I block it...? But it was different this time; I guess I was more upset at the effect of Shinsou's Quirk on you than I thought."

"And that's alright," Izuku breathes out. "That's... that's a good reason to lose control. Good reason, but bad time. Thanks for trying to help me though, even if you weren't supposed to. And, I'm sorry you went through that and... and that all I did was push you away after."

"No," Oboro's smile is back, but nowhere near the bright squinty one, "I'm glad you did. Pushed me away, I mean. Continue to do that. Shove me away if it happens again. I don't want to use your Quirk without your consent, just like you didn't want to use mine without mine. We don't roll like that. Consensual Quirk usage, deal?"

"Yeah," Izuku returns the smile, "deal."

Izuku thinks the ghost's words through for a second before he's letting out a light laugh and leaning into the solid form of the ghost. "That's probably one of the oddest things I've both *heard* and *agreed* too. But it also makes the most sense, as insane as that sounds."

"What can I say?" Oboro's humous tone feels like a breath of fresh air, "I'm a ghost of many clever words. Oboro's words of wisdom."

"Says the same guy who called himself an *emotional support ghost*—"

"Which I clearly am!" Oboro huffs out, gesturing first to Izuku, "you're emotional," then to himself and the way they'd settled so Oboro's arm is draped along Izuku's shoulders, "and I'm support. See?"

"*I'm* emotional? Not this time, Buddy," Izuku teases, unable to wipe the smile off his face as Oboro squawks next to him, pulling away just enough to glare halfheartedly at the living boy.

They sit together on the ground for just a little while longer.

Izuku disappears into the guest room with both Blanket and Fish on his heels when he gets back to the apartment. He'd arrived on time, early even. They hadn't been at the playground for longer than two hours, so there was still some time before dinner.

Shota is half asleep on the couch when he arrives. The tired man gives nothing more than a grunt of greeting when he catches sight of Izuku from behind sleep lidded eyes, but considering the man carries a

sleeping bag and will sleep whenever he has the chance, Izuku takes the ordeal in stride and doesn't comment on it.

Hizashi is somewhere in his and Shota's bedroom, but he calls a greeting when he hears Izuku coming down the hall, and the teen returns is with a light smile that he knows no one else but the cats see.

It's a level of domesticity he hasn't been a part of since he was a child. Since before he got his diagnosis of Quirklessness. Being here, a part of this now, makes his heart flutter in an unfamiliar type of way.

Izuku makes himself at home on at the desk in the guest room, his textbooks and the assignments he'd been slacking on recently spread around him. His teachers had been kind enough to supply him with some extra assignments to boost his grade when he'd worked up the courage to ask.

He's not sure how much the Yuuei staff knows about his situation, but clearly, it's enough to offer him help when it comes to his suffering grades. It's the first time in his life his grades have ever been this low, and he hates it. He'd never had a Quirk growing up, but he'd always been intelligent.

He's still sore—he knows Shota is going to offer him another round of pain medication soon, but that probably won't be until before dinner. He faintly remembers Recovery Girl saying something about taking them every six hours, but then again, he'd been fairly medicated when she'd said it.

Behind him, Oboro is sprawled on the bed with Blanket and Fish.

Fish is laying on Izuku's pillow like he's the king of the room, no doubt getting fur everywhere, and Blanket is tucked away at the foot of the bed, somehow under the fitted sheet and the bedspread. Nemo had shot one look at Oboro before turning on her heels and strutting away when the trio of cats had followed him from the main living area of the apartment at his arrival.

Oboro is watching a movie with the sound on low so Izuku can work, but he's so completely enthralled by it that he doesn't even stir when Izuku's name is called.

Izuku turns in his seat to study the ghost and cats for a second before pushing off the chair and slipping out of the room without disturbing the occupants on the bed.

“Yeah?” Izuku cocks his head when he rounds into the main living area.

It’s been about an hour since he’d returned back from the playground, and now Shota is sitting on the couch looking no more rested than when Izuku had disappeared down the hall. His eyes are still lidded, but he’s at least sitting up, head held up by his palm, supported by an elbow on the armrest of the couch.

“We’re going out,” Shota told him with a huff, not sounding very enthused. “Well, ‘zashi and I are, at least.”

“And you’re more than welcome to come!” Hizashi called from the kitchen, “we’re just heading to the grocery store, but last time you went shopping you got a bit overwhelmed, and we know you’re still hurting after the festival, so you don’t have to come. But you certainly can if you want to.”

Shota gave a hum of agreement, head lulling back to study the child. “It’s completely up to you.”

“O-oh,” Izuku blinks, looking around the room before shuffling his feet. “I... can stay here?”

“Well, that answers that,” Shota huffed, but his lips quirked upwards slightly, “he’s staying home,” the man calls back a bit louder, earning a replying hum from Hizashi in the kitchen.

Hizashi rounds the corner, gazing in from the kitchen doorway, “was there anything you wanted in the house, Listener? We want to have things you like around here too. We’re gonna do some meal planning and stock up on some snacks and the likes.”

“Jelly pouches,” Shota adds, eyes closed again. Nemo is sprawled on the couch cushion beside him, and his fingers tousle with her soft fur. Izuku faintly hears her purring.

“Yeah, yeah,” Hizashi scoffs, “we’re getting your dumb jelly pouches. Caffeine and jelly pouches, the things that make Aizawa Shota’s world go round.”

Shota lets out a huff, “sometimes you also make my world go round.” A pause. “Depending on the day.”

“That was almost cute,” Hizashi gives a sigh, nose wrinkling and eyes shining behind the regular pair of prescription glasses. Izuku likes this

side of his teachers. This teasing, bantering side of them. “Or, it would’ve been if caffeine and jelly pouches weren’t higher on your list than I am, the man you’ve *known* since high school, who you *married*.”

“Don’t feel bad, *dear*, my sleeping bag is also probably higher than you too. As are the cats. You’re a solid fifth, or, if we’re adding the cats individually instead of as a whole, *seventh* place for now. And, you can be annoyed as you want about those jelly pouches, they’re good. Sustenance. At least I’m eating something.” Shota drawls tiredly, one eye slivering open, “and the kid likes ‘em too.”

“Do you see what I have to deal with?” Hizashi gestures to the dark-haired man in playful exasperation. Izuku can hardly contain the giggle threatening to escape his lungs as Hizashi’s gaze shoots towards Izuku, face contorted in what he can now determine is halfhearted betrayal.

His gaze doesn’t linger for long, instead shooting back to Shota as a scowl settles on his face.

“I told you not to teach Izuku your bad habits.” The blonde lets out a heavy sigh, but there’s a fond smile on his face, “I guess since Izuku likes them too we can grab a couple more boxes. You two are not to live off those awful things though.”

“That’s the fastest I’ve ever won an argument regarding jelly pouches,” Shota huffs, finally sitting up and glancing at Hizashi with a light upward tilt of his lips, “we should’ve gotten a kid sooner.”

Izuku feels his cheeks heat up. His homeroom teacher sends him a sly look, eyes twinkling in a teasing sort of way despite the boredom etched on his face. The man pushes himself up off the couch, ignoring Nemo’s *mrroow* of complaint. The dark-haired hero disappears into the kitchen after Hizashi who’d turned on his heels with a huff of annoyance.

Izuku follows behind them.

“Say, Kiddo,” and Hizashi no longer sounds annoyed—it was probably just playful then, “what’s your favourite food? I was thinkin’, y’know, since you did so well yesterday in the festival that we could have a celebratory meal?”

“But I didn’t win?” Izuku frowns. “And I got hurt.”

Hizashi spins to face him, a frown on his own lips, “that doesn’t

matter, Izuku. You worked hard, and made it far. It doesn't matter what place you came in; you did your best. I told you this yesterday, but you probably don't remember it due to the medication, but we're proud of you."

He faintly remembers that. Hadn't he... oh God, he'd cried, hadn't he? Best not bring *that* up.

"He's right," Shota adds softly. He's turned towards the counter, focused on something, but still obviously listening and pay attention. "And speaking of your injury, it's about time for you to take your meds. You're supposed to be resting up so Recovery Girl can see what she can do with that arm of yours on Monday."

Shota had been focused on the small bottle of prescribed pain relief, and a small glass of water. He turns towards Izuku holding both out, a sharp, almost demanding look on his face as he passes the items over. Izuku takes both, downing each before moving to set his glass in the sink.

"So? Favourite food?" Hizashi questions when the pills are gone. "What're we making tonight? It's up to you!"

"Well..." Izuku bites his lip, feeling a little cornered, "I've always like katsudon? B-but I'll eat anything! Really! I'm not picky at all, just—"

"Katsudon it is!" Hizashi cuts the rambling teen off not unkindly. He flashes a wide grin. "It's been a while since we've had katsudon, hasn't it, babe?"

"Mm," Shota hums in agreement, turning back to the counter to put the bottle of pills back in one of the cupboards. "Good pick. Hizashi makes a pretty decent katsudon."

"Pretty decent?" the blonde squawks, "I make a *spectacular* katsudon, Sho."

The word in the middle of the sentence comes out in what Izuku can only assume is English, so the teen doesn't know what it means. He's still not entirely good at the language, but that sounded like nothing he'd ever heard before.

Shota snorts a laugh at it though.

Hizashi shakes his head, pouting. His arms cross over his chest, "just for that you don't get any of my delicious katsudon."

Izuku just looks between the two of them, trying to figure them out. He'd never really had a dad that he remembers, so he'd never really seen parents interacting with one another. Not that he thinks Shota and Hizashi are his parents or anything, it's just the closest comparison. He thinks this is how parents are supposed to be? Kacchan's parents had been like this, but he couldn't base everything off of one set of parents.

He can tell by the way Shota doesn't look put out by the threat of no dinner, that Hizashi isn't serious. It's a playful jest—the threat of taking away something every day, like dinner, just because Shota had offended Hizashi using said dinner. Well, not really offended—teased, maybe? As teasing as his homeroom teacher can get, Izuku's sure it was only said to rile Hizashi up—

"Your meds kicking in, Problem Child?" Izuku's attention snaps up to Shota, who's now stood in front of him, hands tucked in his pockets and an observant look on his face. "You okay? 'zashi was talking to you, but you looked a bit out of it."

"W-what?" Izuku's attention shoots to where Hizashi is stood. Hizashi had been talking to him? He hadn't even noticed. "Sorry, got a bit lost in my thoughts. Um... what were you saying?"

"I was just asking if you wanted anything from the store again before we leave but..." the blonde bites his lip in thought before glancing at Shota, "I'm not sure we should leave if you're not feeling okay."

"I'm fine!" Izuku squeaks out, "I'm fine. Really. Okay. I mean, *I am* okay. I was just... thinking. I promise, you guys... you don't need to stay home just for me; I really am fine. R-really fine."

"And as convincing as that spectacle was," Shota huffs out, a frown decorating his face, "how about you be *really fine* from the couch? We definitely aren't leaving if you pass out in the kitchen."

"I won't pass out," Izuku pouts, but lets the dark-haired man guide him to the couch by a gentle grip on his shoulder. "You'll still leave if I pass out in the living room instead though?"

He's not sure where the quip comes from—probably the pain medication working to numb his arm and injuries until he's got enough stamina for Recovery Girl to fix him up properly.

He almost apologizes for it, but Shota lets out a small huff of laughter. Hizashi also lets out a snorted chuckle of surprise as Shota lightly

pushes Izuku down into the spot he'd been sitting in earlier. "Cheeky brat. You know that's not what I meant. We obviously won't go if you pass out *anywhere*."

"I'm not going to pass out," Izuku tells them again through a half smile. He doesn't know why, but something about making them both laugh makes him feel really happy. "I'll stay on the couch the whole time you're gone—and, I mean, Recovery Girl wouldn't have let me leave if she thought I was going to pass out or something, right? I really was just thinking. I feel fine."

Shota crouches down, staring Izuku dead-on in the eyes. It's like he's searching his soul or something. The teen furrows his eyebrows as his teacher eyes him.

"Actuallyyy, Listener's got a point," Hizashi huffs, but he doesn't look completely convinced. "Chiyo doesn't let kids leave until she's sure they're fine—remember spending three days in there with her?"

"Don't remind me, and yeah, I think the kid's fine," Shota agrees, ruffling Izuku's hair. "No pain?" A shake of Izuku's head, his teacher's hand still knotted in his hair. "Dizziness?" Another shake. "Feeling faint?" A huff along with a third shake. "He's fine. Whatever happened in the kitchen, *thinking* or whatever else, has passed."

The underground hero stands, knees popping as he does so. His hands are back in his pockets, form slouching as he rounds the couch to join Hizashi. "You call one of us if any of that check list changes to yes, got it Problem Child?"

"Got it," the green-haired teen pokes his bottom lip out in a pout. "I'm seriously fine."

"We'll take your word for it then," Hizashi shoots Izuku a smile as he slips his own shoes on. "Just give us a call if it changes. We'll be back in an hour—two tops depending on how busy the stores are."

"Oh goodie," Shota sighs, leaning down to pull his own shoes on. "Behave, Problem Child."

"I will," Izuku promises with a little laugh.

His homeroom teacher lets out a deep sigh, but his lips quirk up in a way they never do in class. Hizashi gives Izuku a wave from the door before he's slipping out, followed just a second later by Shota. And then Izuku's alone.

In his teacher's apartment.

How odd. He probably shouldn't feel as comfortable as he does.

Izuku leans back into the couch. He hasn't really sat down in the living room—tended to stay out of his teacher's way because despite how open and inviting they are, he still can't shake the feeling he's being a burden. Maybe that'll change when they get a more permanent fostering license, but he's not sure.

The teen lets his gaze cast over the living space. His homeroom teacher had seemed to be quite the minimalist, but Hizashi seemed almost the opposite. The room wasn't bursting with life, but it was more decoration and décor than Izuku can imagine Shota having. It's almost a perfect mix of the two personalities.

Izuku takes in all the knick-knacks on shelves, the large shelving unit packed in with books, and records and CD's. There's kind of a colour scheme when it comes to the furniture, but there's just enough odd items thrown in to make it feel home-y— like the cat pillow on the opposite end of the couch that clashes with everything else.

There are some magazines on the coffee table too, mostly Hero related ones. Present Mic is even on the cover of one of them, grinning widely with finger guns. It's promoting *Put Your Hands Up* radio. Izuku will definitely be looking through those at some point.

He catches sight of some photos—there's one or two wedged in on the shelves, and a couple more hung up on the walls. He hadn't noticed them before, but he also hadn't taken the time to study his teacher's living area. Especially not when they were around.

Curiosity gets the better of him.

He inches off the couch, heading first towards the hung photos.

The first one he spots is of his two teachers pressed very close together. Shota's hands are settled on Hizashi's waist, just above where his ribcage starts, and Hizashi's arms are laced around his homeroom teacher's neck. They're slow dancing, Izuku realizes. They're both dressed very well, nice suits and each of their hair styles neat and formal.

They look younger, each of their hair is shorter. Their foreheads are touching, faces pushed so close together; it looks very intimate. A flash of colour drags in Izuku's attention, gold on his teacher's fingers.

Matching rings—no, wedding bands. This must be from their wedding.

Izuku drags his eyes away from the photo.

The next appears to also be from the wedding, since their outfits and hairstyles haven't changed. It's a more forward photo—more than just his teachers as well. It's the wedding party. Hizashi and Shota are stood in the middle, Shota looking tired, but with a tiny smile, while Hizashi grins brightly. He thinks he knows some of the people in the photo like that, that's Ingenium, Iida Tensei, and... is that Midnight? There are a couple other people pressed together in the photo, some he doesn't know at all, probably not Pros even; two men and a woman who look a bit like Hizashi, bright blonde hair and sparkling green eyes, and a woman who looks an awful lot like Shota.

Izuku's eyes flicker over the picture again before landing on the two smallest people there; the first is a little boy with crazy purple hair and a tiny half-smile, and the second is— hang on, is that Iida? From his class? Iida Tenya? His friend and classmate knows about their teachers? Was at their wedding? That's insane. Crazy. Man, who would've thought?

Izuku shakes himself from his thoughts. He'll definitely store that away for later.

The rest of the pictures are more or less just regular pictures. There are some of Hizashi with two older women, and there's a second of Shota and Hizashi with the two older women on either side of them. Shota is almost smiling in that picture. They seem to be getting younger with each picture he looks at. There's a picture of Shota and the woman from the wedding photo, she's got an arm around his shoulders, pulling his tightly against her; and he looks slightly annoyed. She's smiling widely, while Shota's barely got an upward tick of his lips. Other photos are just the two of them, Shota and Hizashi, some selfies usually the camera in Hizashi's hand, while other seem to be captured by someone else. There are people who frequent the pictures, the woman he thinks is Midnight, and Iida Tensei too.

He can't help but let himself smile as he glances at all the pictures. He feels a little like he's prying, but at the same time, all these photos are hung on the walls for anyone to see. It's not like he's snooping through a photo album or something.

The photos on the shelves appear to be the youngest ones. One is of the Sports Festival which must've been their first year—Shota has the

gold, first-place metal around his neck, and Hizashi stands showing off his second-place metal next to him on the podium. He doesn't know the person in third.

In the last picture, they're a little bit older, but not by much. Izuku feels himself smile as he takes in Hizashi's arm thrown over Shota's shoulder and hooked around his neck, hand hanging against the dark-haired teen's chest. He's clearly tugging him in close despite the half scowl, half half-smile on the one who is clearly Shota's face.

He takes them in for another second, before his gaze flicks onto the third person in the photo, Hizashi's arm thrown over them as well. The third person is willingly leaning into Hizashi's side, head cocked in what looks like a laugh.

The smile falls off his face.

Izuku sucks in a breath as he takes in the third person.

The fluffy, cloud-like blue locks of hair, and the wide, squinty-eyed grin that Izuku is very, *very* familiar with. The third figure's arm is laying across Hizashi's shoulder, fist locked on the material of Shota's grey Yuuei blazer and obviously tugging him into the camera frame as much as Hizashi is.

He doesn't mean to snatch the photo frame off the shelf, holding it up to his face in case he's seeing something wrong because this... this isn't... this is— it's... *what the hell?*

His feet are moving before he even knows what he's doing. His world is spinning, tilting with each step, and for a second, he's not sure if it's the unknown, almost betrayed sinking feeling in his chest, or the pain medication hitting him like his teachers had been worried about. Still, he pushes on, feet padding against the ground as he makes his way into the guest room.

"Oboro," his tone comes out neutral, but that's just because he's biting his tongue to contain the surprise and uncertainty, "what is this?"

"Hn?" the ghost hums, attention hardly lifting from the laptop screen where his movie is still playing. Izuku's patience is already so thin that he doesn't even think as he slams the laptop shut. The sound of it startles Fish, who jolts up and scrambles under the bed, but Blanket just stretches a little under the sheets and covers.

"Hey!" Oboro jolts up, a look of devastation on his face as he looks

between Izuku and the closed laptop, “you-you know I can’t open that again! Dirty move!”

“What is this?” Izuku repeats, holding out the framed photo, eyes narrowed at the ghost.

Oboro’s gaze drops to the photo frame, but Izuku can tell he doesn’t really look at what’s framed, just sees the item as a whole. Oboro’s gaze lifts back up to Izuku, and there’s nothing but confusion and annoyance in his eyes, “I’m going to take a wild guess and say it’s a *photo frame*?”

“What’s *in* the frame, you ass.”

The confusion in the ghost’s gaze doesn’t wane as he finally looks down at the picture, taking in the two grinning faces and the third half smile. He stares down at the photo, clearly not understanding what about it has Izuku in a tizzy.

“A school picture...?” Oboro answers uncertainly, finally sitting up from where he was laying on his stomach and sitting crisscross with his hands in his lap, “I didn’t know they framed that one. I like this picture.”

“That’s you.” Izuku breathes out, and he’s not sure why it feels like his world is tumbling down around him. This doesn’t make sense. This doesn’t make any sense. How is this...

“Yes?” Oboro cocks his head, a frown tugging at his lips.

“That... that’s *you*. W-with my teachers.”

“Um,” Oboro blinks slowly, angling his head in confusion. “Yes...? Are you alright? You’re acting a bit—”

“That’s you—” Izuku repeats again, but it’s too himself, like he’s trying to understand it. Like he’s trying to make sense of it. “— you with... with my *teachers*. With my teachers when they were *young*. Oh my God.”

“Izuku,” Oboro speaks slowly, “I, uh, I don’t think we’re on the same page here. Wha-what’s the matter? What’s wrong.”

“You’re my age though.” Izuku glares down at the photo—at Oboro, alive, and well, and the same age as Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic. The same age as Izuku’s teachers. Friends with Izuku’s teachers.

“You’re... I thought you were... you’re my age, b-but you’re with them here, you were- you went to-to school with my teachers but you... you’re my age.”

“Still not following,” Oboro’s frown has deepened, and he’s shifted to the edge of the bed now, prepared to leap up and... well, Izuku’s not sure what he’s prepared to do.

“They weren’t your teachers or... or your g-guardians. They’re your friends. Oh my God.”

“*What?*” Oboro flails a little as he almost phases through the bed in surprise. The ghost picks himself up, planting his feet on the floor and staring at Izuku in shock. “Of course, they’re my friends! Why else do you think I hang around?”

“I don’t know!” Izuku returns in a panicked shout, “you’re my age! You go to school every day. You- you follow my teachers around, what else was I supposed to think?”

“I’ve called them Hizashi and Shota from the moment I met you, Izuku —I mean, I call them *Sho* and *‘zashi*, for heaven's sake. How many teachers in your life have you ever given personal, given-name related nicknames to? Do you think I’d ever do that to a teacher? A *Yuuei* teacher? I thought you knew they were my friends—that I was their friend! It’s not like I hid the fact from you.”

“H-how was I supposed to know that? They told me to call them Shota and Hizashi too! So, so that’s not a valid argument!” Izuku pouts as an embarrassed flush lifts to his cheeks. He’d been wrong. So wrong.

“They’ve adopted you though!” Oboro returns, face lax in shock. He blinks slowly, “of course they’d get you to call them by their names!”

“T-they haven’t adopted me! It’s... they’re... it’s fostering! A-and how was I supposed to know the difference when you’re my age, and you treat them the way they’re asking me to treat them?”

“You think they—that I—that's—no! That’s, that’s, *that* doesn’t even make any sense! Just because I look your age, doesn’t mean I *am* your age.”

“*That* makes a lot of sense!” Izuku hisses, feeling the most confused he has in, well, maybe ever. His gaze shoots to the framed photo again, “if they adopte—I-I mean *fostered*— me, then they could’ve taken you in too!”

“Hey, wait just a minute!” the ghost puffs out his chest, “if *anything*, I’m the one who adopted those idiots! Shota was my adopted introvert, and Hizashi… Hizashi just clings like glue. We met on the first day and have been friends ever since. But still! I was the mastermind behind that friendship, therefor, *I’m* the adopter.”

“Why do you say such odd things?” Izuku can’t help but huff out, glaring at the ghost. His tone comes out exasperated. “I— I’m freaking out here, Oboro. This is—you’re *my* friend, but you were… you were my *teacher’s* friend first! You’re old enough to be my Sensei’s friend! You’re old but, but you look young.”

“I am not old,” Oboro pouts, before his expression settles on something more somber, “and I only look young because this is… you stop growing once you… y’know.”

You stop growing once you… die.

The fight drains out of Izuku like he’s a bathtub that someone just tugged the plug out of. He feels it swirl away, only to be replaced by a dark, sickening weight. He’s not sure how he keeps forgetting Oboro is a ghost. Oboro has gone through something no one living can understand.

“You were only… what? Fifteen? Sixteen?” Izuku asks before he can stop himself. Before he can remind himself that it’s insensitive.

“Seventeen,” Oboro corrects with a shrug. The sadness is there, but the ghost is trying to mask it. “It was my second year at Yuuei an… accident during my internship. I was the only casualty, but it could’ve been so much worse. The villain went rampant, didn’t care that there was a group of school children, and back then I could only… my Quirk wasn’t as strong.”

“You saved them over yourself,” Izuku can read between the lines. It’s correct too, if by the way Oboro bows his head solemnly is anything to go off.

“A building went down, and I could only make one cloud back then so I…” Oboro clears his throat, it sounds wet and raw with emotion, “the kids were safe. That’s what matters. Anyone would’ve done it.”

The teen doesn’t know how to respond to that. How to… what do you say to something like that. He wants to tell Oboro he’s a hero, because he is. He sacrificed himself so those kids could live—that's heroic. But he doesn't know if it’s a sore spot too. He’s died saving them. Died.

Death wasn't a nice topic of conversation—and especially not with ghosts.

"I've made peace with my decisions," Oboro continues when Izuku doesn't speak. The carefree look is back on the ghost's face, but it's sadder—less held together. "I wouldn't do anything differently. It was worth it, because I did what I was training to do. To be the best hero I could, and save people."

And Izuku's never heard anything more motivating.

"You... you would've made a great teacher," Izuku tells him with a watery laugh.

Oboro snorts a laugh now, "y'know, I said almost that same thing to Shota that day. I knew he would, seeing him interact with those kiddos. He's prickly, sure, but he's kind, and supportive and thoughtful—cares to much. He didn't believe back then—man, what I wouldn't give to say *'I told ya so'* to him now."

Izuku huffs out a laugh before he's closing the distance and catching the ghost in another hug.

"Wow, two hugs in one day," Oboro teases as he returns the hug. This one isn't as desperate, but it's calm and comfortable. Just as needed as the first, but in a different way. "What did I do to deserve two in one day?"

"This one's for me this time," Izuku tells him, letting his cheek settle faintly on Oboro's shoulder. He's tall, just like Shota and Hizashi, "you needed the first one, I needed this one."

"That's fair," Oboro replies, and Izuku can almost feel the smile on the other's face. "I think we both needed both though."

"Yeah, maybe," Izuku shakes his head against the ghost. He pulls away, returning the smile the ghost levels in his direction. "I should put that picture back before they get home."

"Probably best," Oboro shrugs. He leans down, hands braced on the bed as he studies the three young faces. Izuku likes the reminiscent look on his face. "Look at Shota's lil' baby face. How cute."

"I should tell him you said that," Izuku scoffs as he finally grabs the picture.

“Bet,” Oboro returns with a sharp, knowing smile. “Tell him I said that, actually, I dare ya to—”

“Yeah... not gonna happen,” Izuku laughs. “That backfired on me.”

“Don’t mess with the ghost,” Oboro grins, slinging an arm over Izuku’s shoulder. The green-haired teen is sure if he compared the scene of himself and Oboro right now, to Oboro and his teachers in the picture, Oboro would look exactly the same in both, “because we fight back with masterfully planned inconveniences.”

“Inconveniences?” the teen questions as the ghost plops on the couch. Nemo glares at him before bolting away. Izuku carries on to the gap in the shelving unit, setting the frame back exactly as he’d found it.

“Oh yeah,” Oboro answers, unbothered by the cat. “Once, Hizashi walked through me twice in one morning, so for the rest of the day, whenever he was alone—at Yuuei, at the radio station and here, whenever he sat down, I turned the overhead lights off. He was spooked, and the best part was, that when Shota came home, he didn’t believe him because I didn’t touch the lights with him there.”

“That’s almost evil,” Izuku can’t help but snort out a hearty laugh. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“You better,” the ghost puffs out his chest. “Hey, since you cut my movie off halfway through, can we watch something out here until—hey wait a second, where are Sho and ‘zashi?”

“Shopping,” Izuku give another shake of his head, grabbing the television remote before plopping down on the couch where Shota had guided him before leaving, “and yeah, sure. Whatever you’d like.”

When his teachers return, Izuku can’t help but look between them and the ghost is apparently, despite his teenaged face and body, their age. He can’t seem to wrap his brain around it, but thankfully his questioning looks are brushed off by both under the ruse that he’s getting some medication side effects.

That night, Izuku eats probably one of the best katsudon dishes he ever has. He hates to say it, but it puts his mother’s to shame. He doesn’t voice that though, simply eats and enjoys the easy conversation with his teachers. He doesn’t even have to worry about Oboro because the ghost is in the guest room finishing his movie. Small victories.

The next day Izuku joins his teachers to get his stuff from his landlord. Just as Oboro had promised, four taped up boxes are lugged from the hall closet—and everyone refuses to let him help carry anything to the car. He feels useless, pouting, even as his arm thrums in a bit of pain.

“Don’t worry about it,” Shota had huffed, giving the teen a side glance from behind his box.

“Rest your arm, lil’ Listener,” Hizashi adds cheerfully. “We’ll be in just as much trouble as you if Recovery Girl doesn’t like what she sees tomorrow, so, relax for us!”

Izuku’s old landlord laughs, patting his shoulder softly before moving to pick up his own box of belongings to help carry to the car.

It’s not until Izuku is tucked away in the backseat of the car—boxes loaded in like an odd, overly large game of Tetris that his phone vibrates with a notification. Oboro makes a noise beside him, most of his body inside the boxes with just his annoyed face peeking out over the top.

“Who’s texting ya?”

Kacchan 11:32 AM

Come over.

Kacchan? Why was Kacchan contacting him? Why was Kacchan inviting him over...?

Only time will tell.

“Do you guys think you could drop me off at... a friend’s house?”

Chapter End Notes

Not a lot of time to chat here, but thank you all so much for taking the time to read and comment! This is probably my biggest fic yet, and the support it's recieving is astonishing! Thank you all!

As always, comments are greatly appreciated, I love seeing what you guys think!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> Foul language warning for this chapter, because Kacchan says fuck. A lot. Also warning for canon suicide baiting, but it's just being talked about a bit. No actual suicide baiting.
>
> Anyways, with that warning out of the way, enjoy me trying to write Bakugou's character because he's hard to write!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's weird staring down at Kacchan's name lighting up his phone screen. It had been... well, *years* since the blonde had texted him, and vice versa. Kacchan had stopped texting roughly the same time Izuku had stopped going over to his house. Probably around the time they started at junior high.

Kacchan was a mystery to Izuku.

For the longest time, after he was diagnosed Quirkless, the ashy-blonde was still kind of his friend. When they were alone, at least. When Izuku was over at the Bakugou home, Kacchan was... well, he wasn't *nice*. But he wasn't mean either.

Their friendship was one that was only there behind closed doors. Locked away in the safety of the Bakugou home, or sometimes even Izuku's apartment.

Which was why neither of their parents ever assumed anything was happening between the two of them. As far as their parents could see, Izuku and Katsuki were friends— and they sorta were?

They always appeared friendly whenever parents were around, and honestly, a part of Izuku still thinks they were friends until the point Kacchan decided to cut him off—leaving his texts on read and mocking him at school.

There wasn't reason for their parents to be concerned, and besides; the bullying, and taunting and teasing only ever happened outside the safety of their homes. When Kacchan was home, or over at Izuku's, he was a completely different person to the bully at school. He was still Kacchan, of course; brash and explosive personality wise, but in the safety of their homes, Izuku wasn't a *target*.

Kacchan was different when it was just the two of them compared to when the explosive boy was surrounded by peers.

When others were around, especially kids of their own age, he was mean, and harsh, and overly-cocky. Kacchan had always been prideful and egotistical, but it seemed tenfold when there was someone around to impress; teachers, peers, random school children crowding around him in hopes of seeing his powerful, *heroic*, Quirk.

Izuku shakes himself from his thoughts, attention slowly straying from his phone screen. The phone had powered down into sleep mode due to inactivity, but Izuku knows the notification will still be there if he was to tap it.

“And where exactly does this friend live?”

Izuku jolts in surprise, gaze darting to his two teachers. They’re both looking at him; Shota’s eyes following him in the rearview mirror, whereas Hizashi is turned a bit in the driver’s seat to glance back at him. The car is still parked on the curb next to his old apartment building. He’d almost forgotten he’d asked a question. He knows Oboro is watching him too, buried under the boxes.

“Do you guys think you could drop me off at... a friend’s house?”

“Well," Izuku rubs at the back of his neck, shooting them a toothy smile that might be a bit too wide to come off as natural. “Um, he actually lives just down the street. I can, well, I can walk from here if that’s easier?”

He’s not sure what he says wrong, because his teachers are looking towards each other, some sort of conversation being held through nothing but their gazes.

“Does this friend have a name?” Izuku almost winces at Shota’s suspecting tone. The drawl comes out somewhere between caution and an almost knowing disbelief. Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but ultimately just snaps it shut again with an audible click of his teeth when he realizes he doesn’t want to admit to who he’s seeing. “I don’t like how you asked that, Problem Child. I don’t like how you had to *settle* on a relation to this person.”

“I didn’t... I wasn’t *settling*,” Izuku tells them, wringing his hands together. “We, uhm, we are friends just... well, I don’t know. Sometimes we are—or, maybe, we-w-we uhm, we *were*?”

“You’re not really filling us with confidence here, Kiddo.” Hizashi tells him softly.

“Sorry,” Izuku bows his head, because apologizing is easiest. “I know this, uh, that it looks sorta bad? But it’s not. Please?”

“Who is it you want us to drop you off to see?” Shota asks, and the tone leaves no room for argument. It’s that demanding tone he uses at school—when the class is rowdy, or Quirks get a bit out of control, or even just when he’s had a long day and is tired of their shit before class even starts.

“K-Kacchan,” Izuku forces out, fighting back a wince.

“No.” It takes all his will-power not to swivel around to glare at the ghost. Oboro’s tone had held little emotion as he huffed the word out like his word had any power over Izuku or his guardians up front. He refuses to look over at Oboro, instead keeping his gaze locked towards the front of the car where his guardians had gone silent in thought.

“Bakugou,” Shota’s tone comes out similarly to Oboro’s, tense and uneasy. It’s almost a bit distasteful in a way a teacher’s voice probably shouldn’t be when talking about a student. “Why?”

“He asked me to come over,” Izuku lifts a shoulder in a shrug.

“And you… want to go?” Hizashi asks slowly, blinking like he can’t quite process Izuku’s own thought process. It doesn’t appear that anyone in the car beside Izuku can see anything past how Bakugou tended to treat not just Izuku, but the rest of his classmates as well. But Izuku knows things they don’t— Izuku knows Kacchan wouldn’t contact him unless it some something important.

Izuku shrugs his shoulders, not quite trusting his own voice not to raise an octave in panic.

“You want to *willingly* go to the home of the boy who tried to, not once, but *twice* in the first few days of school, injure you? The same boy who we have been keeping you apart from in fear that he’ll do physical damage to you in a bout of poor temper? That *Kacchan*?”

It sounds weird hearing Shota’s dull monotone voice spitting out Katsuki’s childhood nickname. Izuku thinks it’s just the underground hero forcing Katsuki and Kacchan into one—Kacchan the childhood friend, and Katsuki, the ex-friend who tormented him.

“Um,” Izuku squeaks out meekly, “yes?”

And he knows it doesn’t make very much sense.

They are looking at this from a whole different perspective than Izuku is. Shota and Hizashi, and Oboro a bit by extension, are seeing Izuku asking to visit the student who’d been nothing but trouble for him since the start of the year, where Izuku is just asking to talk with the one living person who knows probably the most about Izuku despite the years of being... *not* friends.

“Izuku...” Hizashi’s voice comes out unsteady, low and concerned. He and Shota had shared another silent second of eye contact; neither saying a thing, but their faces had twisted similarly in conclusion, “I’m not sure that’s such a good idea.”

“Nothing’s going to happen. Kacchan doesn’t use his Quirk at home. He’s not allowed to.” Izuku huffs out carefully, taking care to make sure his voice doesn’t change, or waver. He doesn’t want his guardians to be angry with him, but he’s going to insist a bit. “Auntie will probably be there too, she doesn’t work on the weekends—or, uhm, she never did before?”

Hizashi seemed to consider this before shooting Shota another look that doesn’t linger long, “an adult will be there? And she won’t let... Bakugou do anything...?”

“He wouldn’t even try,” Izuku insists, and he’s confident in that.

Bakugou Mitsuki is in no way a softspoken woman.

She’s fire-y and persistent and the person Kacchan adopted most of his less than pleasant traits from, but she’s a good mother; soft and nice in her own way when she needs to be and... well, like any good mother, she’d put the fear of God, or *mom*, into her child. It’s no question she loves Kacchan, but she’s also one of the few people who never put up with his bullshit.

When Kacchan pushes, his mother pushes back.

It’s a familiar dance between the two of them, and Izuku has watched them dance it for as long as he can remember. Looking in from the outside, it may appear like a strange dynamic, but Izuku knows that despite how they interact, Kacchan respects his mother.

“You two aren’t seriously considering this...” Oboro lets out an

irritated huff that honestly comes out more defeated than anything. “It’s *Bakugou*. C’mon, you idiots; you’ve seen what that bastard child can do. Use your brainss. Say *no*.”

Izuku is so glad neither teacher can hear the ghost; he’d never wanted to slap his hand over someone’s mouth to shut them up more than he does now.

“If you’re sure about this, Problem Child,” Shota’s tone sours a little like he’s not happy with his own words. “Then I suppose we can drop you off for a while. *But.* But we’re meeting Bakugou’s mother before we leave you anywhere. I’m well aware you’re a teenager, but I refuse to leave you somewhere potentially dangerous unless I know there is an adult who can handle Katsuki around.”

Izuku doesn’t have time to be excited about the small victory before he’s sputtering, “y-you can’t meet them!”

“Oh?” Shota finally turns to look Izuku in the eyes, one eyebrow cocked in challenge, “and why’s that?”

“You’re our Senseis. Kacchan is smart,” Izuku reminds as his lips curl into a frown, “I don’t want him to... I mean, not that I don’t want people to know you guys are looking after me, because I do—well, I *don’t*, but that’s not because it’s you guys—j-just...” Izuku lets out a frustrated noise, trying to arrange his thoughts, “people at school don’t know you guys are, well, t-together, right? ...and I know Kacchan won’t tell anyone if he were to figure it out, because he’s... he keeps secrets, but I don’t want him, y’know... knowing that I ah... that I’m staying with our Senseis?”

Izuku forces out a breath, feeling his cheeks heat up as he realizes how that sounds, “n-not that there’s anything wrong with it! B-because there’s not, I mean, it’s very kind of you two to let me, uhm, let me stay with you, and I’m v-very *thankful* that you’re watching over me, a-and doing everything so I’m not put into the fostering system—just—”

“Take a breath, Kid,” Shota tells him, cutting Izuku off with ease. The teen’s jaw snaps shut, eyes shooting to his lap as he sucks in a breath he didn’t realize his lungs were begging for. “We get it, Problem Child. Stop panicking and breathe for a second.”

Izuku managed a little nod as he takes a few more breaths. “S-sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Hizashi reaches back to settle a hand on Izuku’s knee,

giving it a light squeeze. “You’re fine, and we’re not upset. That’s a valid argument that we overlooked, right, Sho?”

A gruff grumble of acknowledgment from the underground hero. “How do you know Bakugou will know who we are?”

“You look the same in costume as you do out of costume,” Izuku replied flatly, nose wrinkling a little as he returns Shota’s stare. The teacher’s eyes narrow as if Izuku is a puzzle he’s trying to figure out.

“Your landlord didn’t know who we were,” the dark-haired hero remarks.

“The only hero my landlord knows is All Might,” Izuku snorts a laugh. “That only works for civilians who don’t know who you are. Kacchan sees you every day. Kacchan knows who you are, both as Eraserhead and Aizawa-Sensei. He’s smart, remember? He’ll have questions if he sees you with me outside of school on the weekend. And… I don’t want to answer those questions, or have him or anyone else in our class prying just yet.”

“Okay…” Hizashi angles his head a little in thought, “what about me? I’m nowhere near as recognizable. I mean, you didn’t even realize it was me until I called you Lil’ Listener, yeah? And none of your classmates have seen me in civilian clothes yet. I’ll just meet Bakugou’s mother, and if it seems alright, we’ll be on our way.”

“That—” Izuku pauses thinking it over. That might actually work. When Hizashi wasn’t in full Present Mic mode, he didn’t even really sound like the Pro unless he was excited, or used one of the give away nicknames he uses for them. Honestly, Izuku’s sure he wouldn’t have pieced it together so fast if Hizashi hadn’t called him *Lil’ Listener*. “Um, okay.”

“Perfect!” the Pro chirps. “You’re staying in the car, Sho.”

“Fine by me,” the man in question slumps into his seat, eyes slipping shut, “that just means I can have a moment of silence to sleep while you do your thing. But listen here, if Hizashi decides it’s not worth it, Izuku, you leave with him. Bakugou is a wildcard when it comes to you, and I don’t want to have to call Recovery Girl because you two got into a scrap we could’ve avoided.”

“I will,” Izuku nods, and he will. It’s not like he wants to get beat up, or burned—he just knows that Kacchan is serious about the text. And he’d never try anything in his own house, not under his mother’s nose.

“I don’t like this,” Oboro hisses, slumping down on the top of one of the boxes. His arms cross over each other, and his chin settles on his forearm as he sighs. “That kid is trouble. I mean, who just texts someone to *‘come over’* out of the blue? Sketchy.”

Izuku ignores the ghost in favor of rattling out directions to the Bakugou family’s home. When they arrive, Hizashi even parks a few houses back so the car and Shota aren’t in view. Izuku hadn’t asked, but he’d silently been worried about Kacchan placing their teacher just from seeing him in the car. Kacchan was quick to anger, and had an explosive personality, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t observant.

“Ready?” Hizashi turns to look at Izuku.

“As I’ll ever be,” Oboro mopes in reply, even if the question was obviously aimed at Izuku.

The green-haired teen is so close to letting a surprised laugh slip past his lips, barely managing to contain it as he gives the Pro a responding nod. Izuku makes sure his hand flies through the ghost’s head in silent warning as he undoes his seatbelt.

Annoyance is clearly not a strong enough emotion for the Quirk to force activate.

He shuts the door on the complaining ghost, momentarily cutting off the stream of bemoaning whines. It’s barely a second before the still complaining ghost is at Izuku’s side. Thankfully, at that point, Oboro seems to accept defeat and falls silent as Izuku leads Hizashi up Kacchan’s familiar walkway.

He’d thought about texting Kacchan that he was here, but figures it might be better for the introductions to happen without the ashen-haired teen.

Izuku shoots an uncertain look back at Hizashi, but forces himself to knock before he can think better of it. They’re really not waiting long — it feels like it’s only a second before the door swings open.

Izuku stares back at Kacchan’s mother as she pauses in confusion, gaze crawling up him.

It's been a while since he’d really seen her, but before he can open his mouth in a greeting, he’s being swept into a tight, constricting hug. Tight, yet familiar. He sees his guardian tense out of the corner of his eye, but Hizashi makes no move to intervene—it's not like Izuku is

panicking, or struggling at all.

“Izuku!” Mitsuki yawps out, clutching the teen tightly to her chest. He almost feels suffocated in the embrace, but Auntie’s hugs have always been tight like this—he should just be glad she’s hugging him. It’s not like his own mother had in the recent years.

“Hi, Auntie,” Izuku greets because to him she still is the closest thing he’s had to an aunt. She seems to relax a bit at the greeting, pulling away but locking her hands on his shoulders, holding him at arm’s length to study his face.

“God, ‘zuku, I’ve been so worried since that detective called. I knew Inko left—just, I thought you were *with* her. I haven't seen hide nor hair of you, and Kat doesn’t mention you very often, so I just *thought*—and then I see you in that festival with Kat, and then the detective rings me up and *God*, what the *hell* was your mother thinkin’ leaving you alone like that?!”

Izuku shuffles his feet awkwardly, clearing his throat. “The, ah, the detective called?”

Was that what this was about?

“Yeah,” the woman huffs, jaw set in anger, “I just can’t believe Inko. Packed up and moved to America to be with that deadbeat dad of yours. As far as I heard, at least. I told the detective as much too—your mom and I haven’t spoken since she left. I don’t know where she is over there; wish I did. If I get my hands on that woman—”

America. His mother had left the country without him. Japan was apparently too small for her to share with him; she’d needed to put an ocean between them.

The woman heaves in a self-soothing breath through her nose, expression softening as she seems to take Izuku in. “I’m sorry, Kid. I can’t even imagine what you went through. I’m just… I’m glad you’re okay. We all are; Masaru and Kat too.”

Izuku doesn’t completely believe Mitsuki’s claim, but he manages a light smile anyways. He doesn’t doubt Kacchan’s parents being worried about him, but he doesn’t believe for a second Kacchan shared the sentiment. Not completely at least.

It’s just then that Mitsuki seems to notice that Izuku hadn’t shown up alone. Her gaze strays from the green-haired child to the man stood

calmly behind him. Izuku feels her grip tighten protectively, tugging him a bit closer.

He's sure to a normal eye it wouldn't look like anything, but Hizashi probably sees the action for what it is, because he flashes a bright placating smile.

Izuku gives mercy to both, stepping to the side so one of Mitsuki's hand's slips off his shoulder, but the other remains gripping the fabric of Izuku's sweatshirt. He clears his throat and manages his best smile, "Auntie, this is Yamada Hizashi, one of my... uhm, one of my foster dads? And, Hizashi, this is Bakugou Mitsuki, uh, Kacchan's mum."

"You're the one looking out for this brat then?" Mitsuki's voice comes out low and almost warning. Hostile, in a way a mother bear would be. She drags her gaze up the tall man, but Hizashi just keeps smiling.

He gives a nod, cheerful smile never waning, "my husband and I, yes. My husband works with Detective Tsukauchi, who I assume is the Detective you spoke with, and we have our fostering licenses, so Izuku was placed with us relatively fast."

"And you like it with them, 'zuku?" she looks down the teen, gaze prying.

"They're very kind to me," Izuku gives an honest nod. He knows Mitsuki can read his expression and words; knows she sees the honest truth in his words, because she relaxes slightly, studying Hizashi once again with less hostility. Still, he repeats her words back to her just to cement his opinion, "I like being with them."

Hizashi's smile softens to something a little less forced at the soft admission, but he doesn't say or do anything, just slips back into his, what Izuku is gonna dub, 'Present Mic grin'.

"That's good then," Mitsuki nods after a second of contemplation, "I just wish we had've known sooner—maybe we could've taken you in. God, what was your mother thinking?"

Izuku doesn't think that's how it really works, and by the way Hizashi's lips pinch in a frown before the smile returns, he's gonna assume it takes a bit more work than she thinks it does.

Izuku doesn't know how to respond to Kacchan's mother, so he stays silent instead.

It’s not more than a second of almost awkward silence before Mitsuki speaks up again. “I guess I should get my brat down here then. He’s who you’re looking for, right, Izu?”

Izuku gives a light nod, finally tugging away from the woman’s grip as she turns to shout up the stairs.

He casually steps so he can almost press back against his guardian, waiting to see if he’s staying or going. Hizashi sets his hands on Izuku’s shoulders and gives a light squeeze as Mitsuki yells up at Kacchan to ‘hurry his ass up and greet his guest like a good host!’

Kacchan’s returning grumble of ‘yeah, yeah, old hag—it's just ‘zuku!’ has Hizashi’s hands tensing on his shoulders in silent debate.

“That temper of his,” Mitsuki huffs out as she shakes her head, attention lulling to Hizashi as she tuts, “I swear, that kid and I are gonna have a smackdown at some point if he keeps coppin’ that attitude with me. I’ve tried everything short of beatin’ it outta him; too bad the kid takes after me.”

The words come out with a playful lightness; like how Mitsuki used to always talk with Izuku’s own mother about Kacchan’s terrible twos, threes, fours, fives, and... well, every age *since*. She was what people are referring to when they someone is all bark and no bite.

Hizashi hesitates for just a second longer as footsteps start thumping down the stairs, accompanied by Kacchan’s grumbles, before he seems to come to a decision as he gives a light push into the threshold instead of pulling him back, which Izuku takes as permission to actually step in.

Izuku had been right, if anyone can keep the ashy-haired teenager in line, it was definitely his mother.

Kacchan’s jaw is tense when he steps halfway down the stairs, pausing to observe Izuku over his nose. Izuku can see how Kacchan’s muscles tense in a way that must be biting down his usual sneer and tight words.

Izuku watches Kacchan’s gaze travel up the length of Hizashi, but neither says anything. Good.

“C’mon, De-*’zuku*,” Kacchan clenches his jaw, looking away as he continues, “my room.”

Izuku bows his head in a nod, toeing off his shoes and replacing them with an old pair of uwabaki slippers that he remembers always being around for guests. He'd had his own pair the last time he was here, but they definitely wouldn't fit anymore.

He smiles at both Auntie and Hizashi, giving the man a wave goodbye, before following his childhood friend up the stairs. Kacchan had turned, retreating back upstairs, abandoning Izuku as soon as he'd seen him taking his shoes off.

"Very hospitable," Oboro scoffs, keeping pace with Izuku as the teen takes the stairs one at a time.

Izuku ignores him again so he can listen in to the two adults speaking before he's out of ear shot, or Hizashi leaves. He's curious:

"Would you like to come in for some tea or something while the boys do whatever it is teenagers do?"

"Oh, thank you for the offer, but I really should be going. My husband's waiting in the car, he's feeling a little unwell. We just wanted to make sure Izuku got here safe—we're a bit cautious of what he's doing with his injuries from the Sports Festival. We were just on our way home from errands when Katsuki-san texted Izuku."

Izuku had never pegged Present Mic as someone able to lie as flawlessly as he had. Shota, maybe, but Hizashi? He never would've guessed. Izuku's almost impressed.

When Izuku is finally out of earshot, he lets himself glance at Oboro. The ghost's scowl has deepened. "You don't have to stay, y'know," Izuku tells him with a shake of his head.

"Like I'm gonna leave you alone with that explode-y meathead. The guy has bomb hands and the temper of a toddler—last thing I need is to have to guide you into the afterlife because your *friend* got too handsy. I wouldn't be a good tour guide, dude. I can hardly ghost for myself; I can't show someone else the ropes if I don't have a hold of 'em!"

Izuku just shakes his head as he finally steps through Kacchan's ajar bedroom door.

It honestly hasn't changed much from the last time he'd been here.

His friend had liked heroes and had toys and action figures growing

up, but it was never like Izuku. Kacchan had traded his hero adoration in quite early—just a couple years after getting his own Quirk and deciding he was destined to be the greatest hero.

There were a couple old sentimental knick-knacks spaced around the room, but nothing compared to its former glory, or the boxes loaded up in his guardian's car.

"Shut the damn door," Kacchan hisses from the bed, arms crossed over his chest as Izuku finally steps into the room, easing the door shut behind him. He'd be lying if he said his heartrate didn't spike at the blonde's tone, but deep down he knows no blows will come.

Izuku opens his mouth to speak, but is instead cut off by Kacchan's gravelly voice coming out low as to not be heard downstairs, "what the fuck, Deku?"

Izuku can just blink; once, then twice before, "what?"

"What do you mean *what*?" Kacchan growls, "why didn't you fuckin' tell me your mom skipped the fucking *country* without you?"

"Is he serious?" Oboro tone comes out deathly thin. "Why the hell would you tell *him*?"

Izuku's thoughts exactly, "why... why would I tell you, Kacchan? Why do you... why do you even care?"

"I don't!" The blond snaps bitterly but there's something in his voice that doesn't match up with the way he spits the words out, "but the old hag and my old man do. What the hell is wrong with you? Where the hell've you been? The old hag said Auntie Inko left almost *three weeks* ago and you, what, you just decided to keep coming to school like nothing's happened? Like your mom didn't get on a fuckin' plane to America without you?!"

"I..." Izuku sucks in a breath, straightening his shoulders as an angered grimace lifts to his face, "I didn't even know she left until rent was overdue. It's not like she talked to me anymore. You... you know we weren't close. You know *why* we weren't close! So, trust me, *Bakugou*, I was just as surprised as you are!"

"Don't call me that, you fuckin' nerd," Kacchan snarled, inching closer to where Izuku was still stood beside the closed door.

"Back the hell up, asshole," Oboro seethed at Izuku's side, his own

body tensing up. It goes unheard, of course, and it doesn't stop Kacchan's pressing steps, but it's nice to know Izuku's not alone in this. The green-haired teen lets his fingers ghost through Oboro's wrist in an attempt to calm the entity, and it just barely works.

"Don't call you by your name?" Izuku bites back, eyes narrowing, "what would you like me to call you then, huh? You don't like Kacchan, you punched me the last time I called you Katsuki, and now I can't call you by your family name like everyone else? I just can't win with you!"

"Those shitty extras at school call me Bakugou—" the ashen-haired teen hisses, "you're not one of them, Deku. You'll *never* be one of them. I'm Kacchan and you're Deku. That's how this shitty friendship works, so quit tryin' to fuckin' change it! It's fine how it is!"

Izuku freezes as Oboro bristles at his side, "our... *friendship*...?"

For just a second Kacchan looks spooked. Like he's surprised and uncertain at hearing the word repeated back to him. It bleeds away to the usual brash temper just as fast as it appeared, "why the fuck do you say it like that?!"

"We're not friends," Izuku lets slip in his genuine surprise. "This... this *isn't* friendship. We haven't been friends in y-years. You... you hate me, Kacchan. You bully me. You've used me as target practice for your Quirk for years. You and, and all our *classmates* bullied me for something that I—that I couldn't change! *You told me to take a swan dive off a roof and hope for a Quirk in my next life*."

"He said *what* to you?" the tone of Oboro's voice sends a chill down Izuku's spine. He's never heard anger like that from Oboro. "This waste of human existence *suicide baited* you?"

Izuku waves a dismissive hand in Oboro's direction, attention on his childhood friend. Katsuki's body is tense with familiar rage, but his gaze is haunted, almost… regretful. The strange look in his eyes is blinked away and the familiar blazing red is back.

"You know I didn't mean it, Deku!" Kacchan scoffs like he really doesn't see what's wrong with it, "I obviously didn't fuckin' mean it! What the hell do you mean we aren't friends? I let you keep callin' me that stupid childhood nickname, didn't I?"

"You let me— Kacchan is an *affectionate* nickname that I gave to you when we were *babies*, you call me Deku—and you have since we were

six. That... that's—"

"It's just a stupid childhood nickname!" the blonde's eyebrow twitches as he glares at Izuku. "It's literally just another way to say your *name*, dumbass."

"Which means useless," Izuku fires back. "You only called me Deku to pick on me—you- you and your friends! You only gave it to me to mock me with—'useless', 'good for nothing', 'someone who can't do nothing'! You think that's a nice nickname to have—to be *stuck* with?"

"Well, at least I liked you enough to give you one!" the ashen-haired teen bares his teeth, "and they weren't my friends! They were useless extras who followed me around like damned dogs! Like you did when we were kids!"

"I thought you were cool!" Izuku feels his own irritation growing, "I only followed you because you were so cool. You were cool, and confident and you had a really amazing Quirk, and I always thought you were the greatest. You were everything I wasn't, and I was just glad to be around you! I t-thought we were friends! I *thought* we were friends, even though you were mean to me, and I know it was unhealthy and-and downright *toxic*, but I was willing to be the butt of the joke, or the *fucking* target because it meant hanging out with you!"

"We were friends!" Kacchan roars, closing the gap between them to grab at the collar of Izuku's sweatshirt. Izuku doesn't struggle; has years of remaining perfectly still under his belt—just levels the blonde a glare. Izuku is hoisted up by the fabric, being tugged into Katsuki's face so only his slippered toes are on the ground still.

Everything happens so fast—one second Izuku is held up by Kacchan's, thankfully sparkless, hands and the next he's stumbling down to his feet, back hitting the door as he fumbles to get his footing.

Kacchan is taking measured steps back, a hiss on his lips as he clutches his arms to his chest like Izuku had physically *burned* him; the hairs on his arms standing on end as a vicious shiver wracks through his body. "W-what the *fuck* was that, Deku?!"

Izuku's wide eyes lock on Oboro, who looks like a feral animal. He's now in front of Izuku, on the opposite side from where he'd started. Just one glance between the two, Kacchan and Oboro, tells him exactly what he needs to know. Oboro had stepped through Kacchan. It's not a very pleasant experience the first time—or in general, but

the first time is always the worst.

“J-just be happy I didn’t accidentally use your Quirk to use mine,” Oboro growls out when Izuku shoots him a disapproving look. “I’m mad, Izuku, I want to *drown* this bastard in the densest cloud I can.”

“That’s not heroic; not to mention *impossible*,” Izuku huffs out, only to freeze abruptly when he realizes—oh shit— Kacchan is here, and Izuku is speaking to a ghost.

Kacchan’s glare targets Izuku, lip curling. “The fuck’d you just say to me, Deku?”

“I-I wasn’t talking to you, Kacchan— I wasn’t, I mean, I was…” And *wow*, when, oh when did he decide to dig himself a grave *and* dive head first into it? “It was nothing—I wasn’t, I-I wasn’t talking to you I was—”

“You two better not be rough housing up there!” Izuku stammers over his words as Mitsuki’s words pierce his rambles, “I swear, if I find another hole in your bedroom wall, Kat, you’re buying the supplies and patching it yourself!”

“We’re not!” Kacchan barks, anger now turned on his mother, “leave us alone, Hag!”

Kacchan seems to suck in a heavy breath through his nose, glare shooting to Izuku where he just stares for a second, then his eyes flicker around the room like he’s trying to spot something before looking back at Izuku with an unreadable expression.

Katsuki’s gaze locks on the green-haired teen once again, but he doesn’t say anything until: “Sit,” Kacchan demands, pointing to the desk chair.

Izuku shares a subtle glance with the stewing ghost before moving to sit down. Kacchan follows suit, just instead of sitting close, he sits as far away as he can get on the edge of his bed. Oboro heaves a disappointed sigh that they aren’t leaving despite the violent approach from Kacchan, slumping to take a seat on Kacchan’s desk top.

“You still talk to them,” Kacchan states, eyes narrowed at Izuku.

“Talk to… to who?” Izuku breathes out, fingers twitching in his lap.

“Don’t play stupid with me, Deku. You know exactly who I’m talking

about. Those shitty imaginary friends everyone kept telling me you had. Whatever you had those dumb one-sided conversations with like a fuckin' headcase. Our moms said you'd grow out of it, but you clearly haven't."

Kacchan had been one of the few people to know the true meaning of Izuku's muttering.

They'd known each other through their early childhood years, way back when, when Izuku went to doctors, and psychologists and any sort of degreed figure who could diagnose him with something to explain his muttering habit—to explain the imaginary friends, the ghosts.

As they grew up, Kacchan teased him about it, of course. But he never told anyone else. He never turned it around on Izuku. Even now when he catches Izuku muttering to himself, he doesn't do much more than roll his eyes, or scoff.

It was the one thing Kacchan never touched on—not even when he was in particularly cruel moods.

"They're not imaginary," Izuku grits out. He'd told Kacchan that before. When they were little and Izuku figured out that, no, these people were not imaginary. They were real people, just without a physical form. Dead. Kacchan had been the first person Izuku reported back to after the realization.

After the initial snappy reply that whatever Izuku sees *is not really there, Deku*, Kacchan had just ignored it whenever Izuku would mention it. Much like his mother did.

No one ever believed him, and that was fine.

He didn't need someone to tell him it was real, because he could see it with his own eyes.

He'd talk to them, get to know them.

And now he had Oboro, and there was literally no way that this ghost could be a figment of his imagination. Oboro was his Senseis' long dead friend; was photographed and framed in their home, and Izuku had met and gotten to know him without even realizing he was literally his Senseis' friend.

Kacchan levels Izuku a look. It doesn't hold any of his usual blunt

annoyance. It's almost blank.

"What... what just touched me, Deku?"

"*Who*," Oboro corrects in a huff, arms crossing over his chest as he slumps back. His icy glare hasn't strayed from Kacchan. "Callin' me a *what* you egotistical dirtba—"

"A ghost, Kacchan." Izuku cuts the ghost off, glaring down at his own lap. "I know you don't believe me, no one does—no one ever has—but it's the only explanation I have for you—"

"You *honestly* expect me to believe you summoned some shitty ghost? Ghosts don't exist, Deku."

"I-I don't *summon* them. I don't know what you want me to say here, Kacchan—"

"Prove it."

"P-prove it?" Izuku repeats slowly, feeling like his tongue is sticking to the roof of his mouth that the turn of events. "Prove... how?"

Katsuki is quiet for a second before he abruptly sticks his hands behind his back, eyes narrowed in warning, "how many fingers am I holding up? And you'd better not fuckin' cheat."

Izuku blinks at Kacchan for a second, trying to decide if the blonde-haired teenager was being legit—Kacchan didn't move a muscle even as Izuku studies him uncertainly— before turning his gaze back to Oboro.

"You're kidding me, right? You actually want me to do that?" The monotone disbelief in the ghost's voice just makes Izuku narrow his eyes, gesturing to Kacchan. "Alllright, not kidding," Oboro rolls his eyes, making sure Izuku can see he's annoyed, before finally huffing out a sigh and strutting across the floor towards Kacchan.

Izuku almost snorts as his ghost friend dramatically angles his head down towards the small of Kacchan's back, where he looks up with the most unimpressed expression Izuku had ever seen on the usually so lively ghost. "*I* probably could've guessed this from the desk. Middle. Left hand."

"Seriously," Izuku's head angles towards Kacchan who's face hardens. "The middle finger on your left hand. You should at least *try* to be

unpredictable…”

Katsuki’s brow pinches in annoyance, “lucky guess, what about now?”

“Both middle fingers.”

Izuku wrinkles his nose, shooting his childhood friend an exasperated look, “you can’t just hold up both middle fingers, Kacchan, I could guess that without the ghost.”

“Fine,” the blonde snaps, bringing his hands out to settle on the bed beside him, “it was a shit test anyways. Two lucky guesses in a row don’t prove nothin’. Get it to do something else.”

“I can’t just— he doesn’t— he isn’t a *dog*, Kacchan!”

“Yeah, well, unless *he* does somethin’, *he* doesn’t exist!”

“Fine,” Oboro huffs, weaving around Kacchan’s outstretched legs. “I’ll play along for the sake of getting the hell out of here ASAP. Masterfully planned inconvenience time.”

Izuku watches the ghost hop up onto the mattress. The springs don’t squeak under his weight, and there’s not even indents in the soft material where the ghost’s feet are, still, Izuku can’t draw his attention away.

Kacchan looks to be also trying to follow the movements—maybe try to see what Izuku sees, but he clearly doesn’t. There’s not a muscle on the blonde teen that isn’t tensing with negative emotion. It’s a familiar look on Kacchan.

Oboro gazes up at the light before expertly lifting a hand through the flush mount protecting the lightbulb inside. Instantly the room is blanketed in pitch black. Izuku’s body tenses up in surprised because that’s pretty cool! He’s never seen Oboro do something like this before.

Similarly, Kacchan makes a noise of muted distress; surprise and uncertainty colouring his voice in the darkness. Kacchan, for his part, does look a bit startled when the light flicks back on at Oboro’s fingers prodding at the bulb above. The ashen-haired teenager is glaring up at the light fixture in disbelief.

The ghost shoots Kacchan one last snide look, looking like he’s debating sticking his hand through him once more, but seems to

decide better of it and instead tucks his hands into his pockets, “it would be so easy to mess this kid up,” Oboro tuts as he weightlessly jumps off the bed and takes his place back on the desk.

“Please don’t,” Izuku lets out a heaving sigh. He’s so glad these two can’t actually interact because he’s sure it would result in a fist fight. Oboro clearly doesn’t like Kacchan, and Kacchan... Kacchan doesn’t like *anyone*.

“You brought a fuckin’ ghost into my house?” Kacchan demands, eyes darting around the room as if he’d magically be able to spot the entity at just the knowledge, at the *proof*. And that... well, that’s not denial. This is uncharted territory because Kacchan, for the first time in their lives, isn’t immediately shutting it down. “What the fuck? Why the hell would you bring a dead person here?”

“I didn’t *bring* him,” Izuku shakes his head, heart hammering because... does Kacchan really believe him? “He followed and I can’t stop him. What would you like me to do, Kacchan?” Izuku turns back to look at Oboro, throwing his hands up in the air in exasperation—he already knows exactly how this is going to play out, but asks anyways: “If I asked you to leave now, would you?”

“No.”

“No,” Izuku repeats out on autopilot, voice coming out in a huff. The teen lets his hands drop to his thighs when he notices he’d been gesturing to the ghost. Oboro wrinkles his nose but doesn’t add anything else as Izuku turns back to Kacchan who’s eyes have widened a fraction. “He said no. They’re their own people, Kacchan, some want nothing to do with me, and some cling.”

“I am not clingy—”

“You definitely are clingy,” Izuku retorts easily, not even bothering to glance back; just keeps his eyes on Kacchan as he continues without missing a beat, “I met him at Yuuei, he was... a student there.”

“You’re being followed by a dead kid?” Kacchan’s eyebrow arches as the words are soured by his disbelieving tone. “That’s messed up, Deku.”

“I’m not a kid!” Oboro snarls, body tensing in annoyance behind Izuku. Izuku thinks that these two may never be friends—which is probably for the best.

“He’s seventeen,” *physically*, at least, Izuku thinks but doesn’t mention. “So, he’s not a kid.”

“Yeah, *kōhai*,” the nickname comes out in a low, sickly-sweet venomous drawl, “that makes me your *senpai*, doesn’t it? You tell him that, ‘zuku. I wanna see him squirm.”

Izuku chokes on a breath, “I would literally rather die than say that to him.”

Kacchan bristles at the words, a dark scowl settling on his face as his eyes scan unseeing over the space behind Izuku, clearly determining that’s where the ghost must be since Izuku keeps glancing back at it.

“What the hell did that bastard ghost say about me?!” Kacchan’s body tenses up like he’s getting ready to pounce, but after a second of his muscles tensing, he seems to force himself to calm down. “You better not be fuckin’ with me, Deku. I swear to God if you’re tryin’ to make me look like an idiot, I’ll—”

“Fifteen years is a long time to keep a gag running, Kacchan,” Izuku shakes his head. He probably sounds tired; and he is. He’s so tired. This is the closest he’s ever come to someone believing him. It takes time, and convincing, and in this case, a full-on fight. “And even if I was, how do you explain that cold sensation? He walked through you. And the light? I mean, I honestly could’ve guessed the other test, but there’s no way I could’ve faked those!”

“That ghost asshole did that on purpose?!” Kacchan spits, rubbing at his arms where the hairs on his arms are still standing on ends, “fuck, it felt like my blood froze!”

“Damn right I did! And I am not sorry!” Oboro hisses, arms crossing over his chest. Oboro definitely should not look so smug—especially not when Izuku is *still* playing damage control for Oboro’s chilling party trick. “I wish I’d have done it sooner too!”

“Not helping,” Izuku snaps. Oboro at least has the decency to look shamed, though his gaze strays back to Kacchan where it hardens again. “He’ll try not to touch you anymore, Kacchan.”

“I will?” Oboro abruptly shuts his mouth at the sharp glare Izuku shoots over his shoulder. “Fine, I will. Unless that jackass makes the first move, then all bets are off.”

“Knock it off,” Izuku seethes out between his teeth. The ghost slumps

down in defeat.

“You really aren’t fucking with me,” Kacchan mutters, eyes narrowed on Izuku but not in the usual angry type of way. There’s a blissful moment of thoughtfulness in Kacchan’s gaze; eyes and face lax of anger in an attempt to understand. “Why the hell didn’t you get your ghost friends to touch someone before?”

“I just met him,” Izuku frowns, “I mean, not *just*, of course, we are friends, but... I met him at the start of the school year.”

“Not that specific one, idiot,” Kacchan snaps as if Izuku had just said the dumbest thing he possibly could’ve, “any of ‘em— all of ‘em, I don’t fucking know. You’ve been talking to them all your life—why now?”

Izuku considers this, glancing back at the ghost.

Oboro is quiet, but attentively listening.

“Ghosts are...” Izuku debates his words, “in passing, usually. And I mean that by they don’t tend to stick around after they meet me. They don’t usually follow me. S-some continue their everyday lives after they die like they don’t even know they’re dead, some follow loved ones, some just hang around where they, y’know, *d-died* and others... well, others go beyond. I-I'm not sure where they go, or what happens. I’ve never and won’t ask, because I... don’t wanna know.”

Izuku shakes his head, thumbing at the bandaging on his arm as something to do, “I can’t even really tell the difference between them and us unless, y’know, they um, they *look* dead... Ghosts talk to me, but they don’t tend to follow me—like I meet them in passing all the time, but Ob—t-this, um, this ghost, is the only one who’s actually... you know, *stayed*. We-we became friends.”

“You could not get any fucking weirder, Deku.” Kacchan averts his gaze, eyebrows furrowing as his jaw clenches. “Fine, I believe you. You’re some shitty ghost whisperer or whatever. Just stop talking to it —*them*— at school—I won’t cover for you again, got it? Beating you won’t mean shit if our class thinks you’re a psycho.”

“B-beating me?”

Kacchan’s glare snaps back to Izuku, “I don’t know how a Quirkless nerd like you ended up with a Quirk—a late bloomer, or whatever bullshit lie you spewed about All Might giving you a Quirk—doesn't

matter. I will still be better than you. I'm going to be the number one hero, and I don't care who you have helping you. I will beat you."

Izuku's not sure how to respond, so he doesn't. He just looks at the blonde like he's trying to understand him. He doesn't.

Finally, Izuku gives a nod.

His mind drifts back to Kacchan's furious, but not *explicitly* angry, shout of *'We are friends!'*. He's a bit surprised Kacchan considered him a friend. Izuku always had considered Kacchan one because he was his... Kacchan had been his first friend. His closest friend for many years. He's always looked up to Katsuki—admired his strength and power and confidence.

Maybe the ashy-haired teen shared the same sentiment in his own way.

Kacchan has always treated him differently than everyone else, it just... it wasn't exactly *nice*.

"This isn't exactly a healthy relationship, Kacchan," Izuku whispers, refusing to look at the other teen. "You bullied me. Maybe you don't really anymore, but you *did*, and you-you're still not... you're not nice. We shouldn't be friends. We... we aren't really friends, but I think I'll always consider you one anyways."

To be fair, Kacchan wasn't really nice to anyone. He still felt the need to mention it though.

"We're rivals now." Kacchan tells him, the closest to soft Izuku is sure his childhood friend has ever sounded. "I will be better than you and all those shitty extras in class, no matter what Quirk you, or any of them, have— so... so you better keep up with me and give me an honest fight, Deku. Not like that shitty Icy-Hot who didn't."

"We're not friends." Izuku repeats again, and Kacchan's head angles in exasperation. "But we are..." yeah, rivalry describes their dysfunctional friendship to a tee at this point. "We are rivals."

"Keep up, Deku," the other teen huffs. There's a curl of annoyance in his tone, but that's literally just how Kacchan's voice is. "Things better not change at school either. I still want nothing to do with you or your shitty ghost friend despite all this. And you, ghost kid or whoever the fuck you are, touch me again and I'll find a way to kill you all over again."

“Kacchan! That’s so insensitive!” Izuku cries out, shooting Oboro an apologetic look.

Oboro doesn’t even seem phased by the explosive teen’s words, simply rolls his eyes and catches Izuku’s gaze, “can we leave yet? The longer we stay, the more tempted I am to power through my own discomfort and *stand in him*.”

“I, uh, I should be going,” Izuku tells Kacchan, standing and ignoring Oboro’s drawn out *‘Finalllyyy!’* as the ghost slips off the desktop, where he waits impatiently by the door. “My foster parents will be waiting for me to come back…”

“Yeah, you should,” Katsuki snipes, standing as well. He gestures Izuku out the door in a sarcastic sort of way, following Izuku down the stairs, just a step or so behind him. The ashen-haired teen settles by the door as Izuku swaps the slippers for his shoes.

Izuku pulls the door open, takes one step out; “Maybe you could come around again sometime,” the words are quiet, but Izuku pauses anyways. “To give the old hag peace of mind, I mean. She likes you for some godforsaken reason.”

“Yeah,” Izuku turns a little to look back. Kacchan is glaring at the floor. Intensely. “Maybe. If, ah, my guardians say it’s okay. I… I don’t live around here anymore. A-anyways, um, I… I’ll see you at school tomorrow.”

“Unfortunately,” Kacchan growls out, gaze shooting up and locking on Izuku with his lip curled in an irritated snarl. Izuku shrinks in on himself a little before stepping the rest of the way out. “And Izuku?” Izuku pauses, staring ahead, “I’m sorry about your mom, what she did really sucks.”

Izuku doesn’t say anything else, just chokes on a stuttered breath and bows his head as he finally steps all the way out, easing the door shut behind him. He roughly drags the heels of his palms under his eyes to dry up the welling tears.

“Maybe he’s not a complete waste of space,” Oboro’s voice is soft at Izuku’s side. He almost startles—almost forgot the ghost was there. “He’s still a prick though—has therapy done *anything* for that kid?”

And that gets a laugh from the green-haired teen. “Believe it or not, he’s ten-times better than he used to be in middle school. Hound Dog is a miracle worker.”

“Well,” Oboro frowns as Izuku pulls his phone out of his pocket, “that’s a worrying thought."

Shota 1:23 PM

Text us when you’re ready to be picked up.

Izuku smiles down at the text, fidgeting with his phone.

He’d honestly never thought of someone like Aizawa-Sensei having a smartphone—and it sounds stupid to admit, but it had thrown him for a loop when the dark-haired hero had recited out his personal number for Izuku to input in his own cell, as he’d whipped his own phone out and requested Izuku text him so he’d have the teen’s number in turn.

Hizashi had gotten to him first when it came to number exchanging; having swiped Izuku’s phone from his hands to add his own number with a wide grin, then sent himself a text too.

The text had come in around the time Izuku had followed Kacchan up the stairs, so Shota must’ve texted it when they left. He feels a bit bad that he’d ignored the text up until this point, but he honestly hadn’t felt his phone vibrate.

Izuku 2:31 PM

That’s ok, I’ll take the train! I’ve got my student transportation pass, no need to come all the way back over just to drive all the way back. Walking to the station now!

Surprisingly, Shota response comes almost instantly.

Shota 2:32 PM

Logical.

Good call.

Izuku nods to himself at the response, carrying on down the Bakugou walkway and making his way towards the train station. He jumps in surprise when his phone vibrates again, not long after the first texts.

Shota 2:34 PM

Hizashi disagrees and would’ve liked to come get you

Ignore the whining when you arrive, god knows I’m trying to

And how can Izuku not smile at that?

Chapter End Notes

Did I make Katsuki confusing? Yes I believe I did. Hopefully it comes out alright? Sorry if it’s too confusing, I just really wanted to write some Bakugou trying to be a friend, but in his own awful way because he literally doesn’t understand human emotion in any way that’s not anger. And I wanted someone to know about the ghosts who already kinda knows about the ghosts. Not that it changes much—their relationship will remain like 90% the same throughout this fic as it is in the anime.

Also, Kacchan has good parents because I said so. Mitsuki is just a mom trying to wade through raising an angry Pomeranian child.

Sorry this is a bit late, I was going to write today and then I had no motivation so I slept instead! Still got it done though, even if it's a bit shorter than I'd planned on making it! This was another chapter I decided to break into two so it didn't get too long. I'm very excited for the next chapter-- so get ready for it!

Anyways! As always comments are always appreciated! I love reading them and seeing what you guys think! Makes me super happy! Thanks once again for all the interaction this has been getting! We hit 3k kudos which is insane, and all the comments and bookmarks are also incredible! Thank you!! <3

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! So, this chapter wasn't *really* planned? You can thank my irl friend for this bad boy because I just couldn't not write it when they were feeding me ideas for it. Below is a bit of a blurb of where the idea of this chapter came from!
>
> My friend laying on my bed, staring at the ceiling: School in Japan starts in April.
> Me, at my desk: Uh huh? What about it?
> My friend: May comes after April.
> Me: Yes, that is how months generally work.
> My friend: …Oboro's birthday is May 5th.
> Me: 0o0 You son of a bitch, I'm in.
>
> I think you can see where we're going with this chapter :)
>
> Also, maybe a bit of a warning for Oboro spoilers? NGL, I have no idea what's spoilers or not since I've only watched the anime and read other fanfiction, but I haven't read Vigilantes yet, so, there may or may not be? Read at your own risk, I suppose? Anyways, onwards with the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nothing at school changes between Kacchan and Izuku on Monday or any day after.

Izuku had expected it, but he's not sure if he's glad or upset nothing changes. They'd sorta had a heart to heart, just in their own odd way. But Kacchan had told him up front things weren't going to change much.

Still, the green-haired teenager returns the borrowed earbud, leaving it on Kacchan's desk after he arrives early that Monday with his guardians. When Hizashi is home in the mornings, they arrive to school much earlier than when it's just Izuku and Shota home in the mornings.

Izuku thinks it's a bit funny—his teacher always on their case about tardiness and being on time being the one that's always in danger of being late, while the seemingly carefree and boisterous English teacher is entirely punctual.

Kacchan doesn't so much as look back at Izuku when he spots the lone earbud; just slips it into one of the pockets of his backpack and collapses in his seat (but not without glaring back, over Izuku's shoulder like he's trying to spot Oboro, who, at the time, wasn't even in the classroom).

Though things don't change between them, Kacchan's attitude towards Izuku does take the faintest step upwards. He's still not nice; no nicer than he is to any of their other classmates, but he's not as blatantly rude or hostile anymore. It's hardly noticeable—Izuku doubts their peers will be able to spot the difference in Kacchan's aggressive personality when it comes to their green-haired classmate, but to Izuku it means the world.

It's not a lot, but it's *change*. And it's change in the right direction.

Maybe at some point they can actually be friends again—have civil conversations. Maybe at some point Izuku will feel at ease joining the Bakugous in their home again, but for now, the progress is micro but appreciated.

And though he still calls Izuku Deku, the nickname has softened a little around the edges as well when it comes from Kacchan. It's in no way a nice nickname still, but it comes off nicer than it had prior, and that's a step up too.

Izuku doesn't forgive Kacchan entirely—he hadn't said sorry for the things he'd done or anything over the years, but he seemed now to realize it wasn't exactly right. But even if Kacchan did say sorry, that doesn't change the fact he'd suicide baited Izuku and bullied him for the better part of their lives when their parents weren't around.

Izuku wonders if Kacchan talks about him with Hound Dog—he hasn't broached the subject yet, but he'd probably need to at some point. Maybe it would be nice to get it off his chest, without naming names.

He really doesn't want Kacchan to have any additional repercussions —Aizawa-Sensei had already dealt a punishment for Kacchan, and the ashy-haired teen was going to counselling, which Izuku thought he'd never see. Sure, Kacchan had been wrong, and a bully—but Izuku knew in the deepest pits of his heart that the blond would one day be a damn good hero.

So no, nothing really does change in their relationship; well, besides maybe one thing...

Kacchan's gaze seems to occasionally sweep over the classroom, usually around Izuku, as if expecting to spot something. Izuku doesn't even really notice it at first, when Kacchan's head would angle, eyes narrowed and nose wrinkled like something was physically offending him. After the first couple times, Izuku takes notice and puts the pieces together.

Kacchan always scowls when being caught looking around for an entity he knows he won't be able to see, but still completely believes is around, and Oboro flat out cackles when he realizes the development too; from then on, Kacchan's pens, and pencils and any other writing utensil rolls directly off his desk whenever they're put down, even if just for a second.

Oboro watches the writing utensils Kacchan has like a hawk, swooping in like a cat whenever he sees the opportunity to flick things off of the desk, watching them roll onto the floor in satisfaction.

Izuku doesn't have the heart to tell the ghost off, and Kacchan clearly hasn't pieced it together just yet, so Izuku lets the ghost take his frustrations about Kacchan out on Kacchan. At least until Kacchan realizes his desk *isn't* uneven or slanted.

Maybe he should at least tell Kacchan that Oboro only joins them in two of their core classes, but he won't lie and say it's not entertaining to see the ashen-haired teen jerking his gaze around when the lights above so much as flicker.

The days carry on.

Another week in the Heroics class passes.

Wednesday, the two-week trial deadline approaches and passes.

Izuku social worker drops in at the apartment Wednesday almost directly after school for the home inspection she'd mentioned, and it's Izuku who's encouraged to show her around. Shota and Hizashi trail along behind the social worker, and Oboro thankfully stays in the guest room that Izuku supposes he can now call his own bedroom, considering the couple items of Hero merch he's selected from the boxes to liven the place up at Hizashi's insistence.

Izuku's a nervous wreck as he shows her around, internally cursing his stutter that hasn't been as bad as it had been in literal years. The cats weave underfoot almost as if sensing his unease, and he narrowly misses stepping on Blanket, who stops directly in front of Izuku and

flops onto his side for attention. The teen stumbles as he steps *beside* the cat instead of *on* him; quick to reach down and pick the fluffy beast up, cuddling the easy-going demon to his chest as he continues the tour.

At some point in the tour, his social worker and guardians take pity on him, and Hizashi steps up to take the lead. Izuku falls back with Shota, who leads him to the living room and gently eases him onto the couch by a calloused hand on his shoulder.

Izuku listens from his spot as Hizashi talks on about how the household has changed for the new addition. Like the locks—they'd locked a cabinet in the kitchen. Izuku hadn't even noticed there was a lock—but then again, he'd never searched out alcohol. Plus, he's too short to reach the cabinet above the fridge anyways.

Similarly, medications had been locked away, which Izuku can't help but frown at. He understands it's just for the visit, really, he's no danger to himself unless he's using One for All, but it's still upsetting that this social worker doesn't trust him at all. His pain relief pill from Recovery Girl (that he no longer needs), had sat on the kitchen counter and neither guardian had seemed worried about it; they trust him.

It's dumb that this woman gets to make all these decisions for him, even when she hardly knows him.

They talk more about him, sitting around the kitchen table like Izuku isn't in the adjoining room. They talk of the Sports Festival, his injuries, his medications. His physical exam with Recovery Girl, and even his sessions with HoundDog that are still happening. Izuku glares down at the purring cat in his lap as the woman pries into his life.

Until finally, *finally*, the woman agrees that Izuku is in capable hands with his teachers as his guardians. Shota signs the paperwork as his main guardian, and Hizashi as the secondary. They have equal standing, but since Shota was his initial guardian when it came to the emergency fostering, it's just easier to extend that and add Hizashi in separately.

The woman finally leaves later in the evening with a warning of surprise visits and wellness checks on her lips. They'd all expected it. The three of them gather around as she leaves, sending her off with grateful smiles.

"I'm too stressed to cook," Hizashi huffs out after a beat as soon as the

door shuts behind the woman, “who’s up for some celebratory take-out? You’re official ours, Izuku!”

“Yay!” Oboro cheers from Izuku’s bedroom, but doesn’t make an appearance. Izuku can’t help it when his smile widens at Oboro’s cheer.

Hizashi moves in, wrapping Izuku in a welcome hug. The teen melts into it, squeezing his official guardian back. He feels giddy and excited —relieved. He gets to stay. Almost as if reading his thought, Hizashi continues, voice softening as he presses his nose into Izuku’s curls, “you’re here to stay, sweetheart! Look, even Sho’s got a smile!”

“I don’t,” the dark-haired man huffs, voice coming out tired and fond. Izuku feels Shota’s fingers tangle in his curls too, and Hizashi’s teasing laugh vibrates Izuku where he’s still clutched to the man’s chest in a hug. “Welcome home, Problem Child.”

And he’s definitely not tearing up. Nope. Definitely not. “T-thank you.”

Nothing else really changes after the stamp of approval from the social worker.

The week carries on. Classes are the same as usual. The only thing that’s different is the relief in the teen’s chest whenever he makes his way back to the apartment, or settles down in the bed—*his* bed. He’s here to stay for a while.

Shota tells them of the upcoming offers for select students who caught the eye of Heroes and agencies during the festival. He mentions it, but doesn’t add much detail yet. He informs them that he needs time to sift through the offers and get in contact with any and all interested parties before actually letting the students select where they want to intern.

At home, Izuku sees Shota hunched over his laptop in most of his free time. He’s always got what appears to be an endless mug of coffee, and his expression flickers between scowling and frowning as he reads through internship requests.

Not every student in 1-A will be getting them, and Izuku knows that some students will get more attention than others, but he still can’t help but hope he gets one, or two himself, even if he hadn’t actually placed.

Still, Izuku doesn't ask, and his teacher doesn't tell.

Their classes continue on with a little bit of normalcy. They work hard with their Quirks—the festival had been eye opening for some of the students. It really put into perspective where everyone needed to focus their attention when it came to improving; none of them had been perfect.

On Friday, Aizawa-Sensei promises that on Monday he'll finally reveal the internship requests to those affected and let them select where they want to go if they have more than one agency interested in them.

Saturday morning is odd.

Oboro is in his room reading when Izuku wakes up.

After the plate incident with Shota, the ghost has been focusing his energy on random items around the apartment, but he seems to have the best results in guest room where Izuku stays. The ghost isn't good at picking things up and holding them, but he has gotten good at pinching pieces of paper between his fingers, so as of recent, Oboro has been spending his time reading.

Izuku wakes to the ghost at the desk, hunched over a book he'd requested Izuku snag from the shelving unit in the main living space. His eyes scan over the words and when he reaches the end, it takes a good minute or so for the ghost to focus on the pages and his own fingers enough to turn the page.

It's a process.

Izuku throws his covers off with a yawn, ignoring the way the blanket shifts until Blanket the cat's head emerges. Fish is at the end of his bed, tail swaying as the cat glares at Oboro. Nemo still spends very little time in Izuku's room, and the green-haired teen can only wonder what Oboro had done to piss the cat off so much that she avoids rooms he's in.

"Mornin'," Oboro throws a wave over his shoulder without looking up from the book.

"Hey," Izuku greets in return, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "I'm going to get some breakfast."

"I'll be here," the ghost hums out, eyes focused on the corner of the paper where he's hovering his fingers.

The rest of the apartment is quiet, and for a second, Izuku thinks maybe Shota and Hizashi had stepped out for the morning to run errands or something, but to his surprise, he finds them both sat at the kitchen table.

Neither notices him.

Shota's head is down, arms pillowing his head even though Izuku is sure the man's forehead is on the hardwood. His hair is down, still wearing his sweats and the shirt he'd gone to sleep in the night before. One of his hands is loosely curled around his coffee mug, the dark liquid untouched but no longer steaming. Weird.

Hizashi looks off too. His hair is pulled into a messy bun and he's still wearing his sleeping clothes like Shota. He's leaning heavily on the table too, elbows supporting his body, and his head ducked slightly like he's glaring down at the table. His mug is grasped between his hands, cooled off as well, but it's only half full as opposed to Shota's full cup.

Hizashi is staring off into space, eyes locked on nothing—almost unseeing. There's a downward curl to his lips and his thumb trails along the ceramic of his mug thoughtlessly.

Izuku must make a noise of surprise, or maybe he shifts or something, because a second later Hizashi's gaze is lulling towards the teen and he's forcing a tiny smile, "mornin', sunshine," Hizashi greets.

"Good morning," Izuku shuffles lightly before deciding to step into the kitchen.

Hizashi's gaze follows Izuku as he makes his way to the counter, pulling open the snack cupboard to select something quick and easy to eat. He'd been sleeping in lately—he's going to have to get back on track with his morning running soon.

The teen reaches blindly into the jelly pouch box and manages to pull out a peach flavored one.

When he turns back, neither man has moved. Hizashi is looking down at his mug, and Shota hasn't stirred at all. It's not strange per se, they don't watch him, but they do tend to glance at what he's up to usually. But neither really moves.

And that's when Izuku decides something is wrong.

Hizashi hadn't even complained about Izuku eating a jelly pouch for breakfast—something is definitely wrong.

The kitchen feels heavy, but it's only now that he's noticed his guardian's dour moods that it really fills in around him—it's different than every other time Izuku has been here since moving in with his teachers. It's heavy, and almost suffocating. Sad. But why?

"A-are you guys alright?" Izuku's eyebrows furrow as Hizashi looks towards him again. Shota doesn't really move still—doesn't even lift his head at being addressed—but his shoulders do shift a little as he breathes.

"We're..." Hizashi bites his lip, looking at his husband before returning his gaze to Izuku. His expression softens a little and he manages another tiny smile that looks *wrong* on his face, "it's a sad day, Kiddo."

"Oh," Izuku breathes out. He gives a light nod. He doesn't really understand, but at the same time, he *does*. He wants to ask questions, but he also doesn't want to pry. They're sad—he's not sure why, but they are. And they probably don't want to deal with him right now anyways. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Shota speaks, voice coming out gravelly, almost sounding emotional. He still doesn't lift his head. "We're fine, Problem Child. Just... it's not a good day."

"We'll be right as rain tomorrow, Listener, don't worry your little head, ya'dig?"

"Oh," the teen repeats, just because he's not sure what to say. He fidgets with the jelly pouch, not looking at either guardian. "I... I'm going to eat this in my room. I've got some homework."

"Okay," Hizashi nods, voice soft in a way that Izuku's never heard before. The man tucks a stray clump of golden hair behind his ear as he continues, "if you need any help with your English homework, let me know."

"O-okay," the teen bows his head before scampering out of the room. He doesn't dawdle as he makes his way back into the guestroom where Oboro hasn't moved. The ghost's tongue is poked out in concentration as he glares down at his book, but Izuku's nerves get the better of him, and before he can stop himself, he's blurting; "there something wrong with my teachers."

Oboro pouts when his concentration is broken, but turns to the teen with his head cocked in interest. “Oh? I’ll need more than that. What happened?”

“See for yourself,” Izuku gestures to the doorway, heart pounding in his chest as he sits on the bed. Fish still hasn’t moved from the edge of the bed, so Izuku strokes the cat’s head in an attempt to calm himself down. The cat makes a little ‘purr’ noise before butting his head against Izuku’s hand in an attempt to demand more pets.

Oboro shoots Izuku an odd look before doing as told and disappearing through the closed bedroom door. He’s not gone long, maybe ten seconds before he’s back with a perplexed look. “Yeah, that’s weird,” the ghost agrees. “Did they say anything...?”

“Just that it’s a sad day,” Izuku frowns as he wracks his brain for anything else that might be of use. Izuku’s words have Oboro freezing up, his own frown deepening as he looks in the direction of the kitchen briefly, before his eyes are back on Izuku, clouded with some unfamiliar emotion.

“What... what’s the date?”

“The date?” Izuku bristles in surprise. It takes just a second for Izuku to figure out the date off the top of his head. Yesterday had been the fourth, so today is obviously the fifth. “W-wh—uh, it’s the fifth. May fifth.”

“Ah,” Oboro turns away, slumping back to his book. He drops down heavily in the desk chair, glaring down at the book, “that explains it.”

“E-explains what?” Izuku demands lightly. “What’s wrong? What happened? Why-why are they upset?”

Oboro turns back to Izuku, gaze surveying over him before the ghost gives a little half-smile, head angling to the side. The half-smile is sad —but accepting. It only makes Izuku even more confused until: “It’s my birthday.”

Izuku’s brain screeches to halt. It was Oboro’s birthday? Why hadn’t he known? Why hadn’t the ghost told him?

“It’s... r-really?”

Oboro gives a hum of confirmation, head bowing the slightest into a nod as he glares down at the book before him. His hands are settled in

his lap and he no longer looks tempted to try reading anymore. The energy that fills the room is not the same energy that's in the kitchen. It's sad, but not downright depressing and suffocating like his teachers. It's like... defeat? But it's accepted.

"Happy birthday." Izuku's lips curl down in a light frown as he fiddles with the jelly pouch in his hands. Oboro swirls around in the chair to gap at Izuku, and Izuku can just jump in surprise at the emotions flickering through the ghost's awestruck gaze.

A sinking feeling settles in Izuku's heart. Oboro looks shocked, and touched at the words—simple words that Izuku had muttered out of habit. It's the first thing you do when someone tells you it's their birthday, right? Acknowledge it. Acknowledge them. Birthdays are special—most people want to feel special and noticed—*remembered*.

"T-thanks, Izu," Oboro's voice is heavy with... Izuku's not quite sure. Sadness, relief, desperation. Maybe a bit of joy at hearing the words too. "It's been a while since..." the ghost clears his throat, "y'know. No one wishes someone not around a happy birthday. Kinda pointless."

And ouch. Izuku sucks in a breath.

Oboro had been around all these years, had hung close and stayed—and every year his birthday had passed. Izuku can only imagine what happens each year based on what he'd seen in the kitchen: the ghost's friends clammed up, and the atmosphere dropped into a chilling, depressing state. The memory is there, but it's not light and cheerful, it's dark, sad and regretful.

Izuku doubts Oboro had heard the words since he'd died all those years ago when his teachers were students at the school they now teach at.

"I'm sorry," Izuku shakes his head until his unruly curls fall into his eyesight, blocking his view of the room and the ghost still watching him, "I've never even *thought* about... is it like this every year?"

"Don't be," Oboro blows out, standing out of the chair to settle beside Izuku on the bed. The ghost's back presses against the headboard, one leg outstretched along the mattress, just shy of touching Izuku's thigh, and his other foot is still settled on the ground. "It's really not your fault."

When Izuku glances to the side, he sees a small smile on Oboro's face.

It wavers slightly before he's looking away and clearing his throat again, "it's gotten better, honestly," the ghost informs fiddling with his own fingers, "it used to be... bad. They used to get... God, they were so upset. It sucked; you know? To s-see them so *sad*, and *angry*—mad at the world, and hurt over... over me."

Izuku tries to keep his own raging heart under control as the ghost talks.

"It's been a long time now, and I know they still get upset on my birthday and... and the day I died, but it's not like it was years ago, thankfully. It doesn't hurt them as much—isn't as fresh. I'm just glad they remember me still, even if it's mostly guilt and regret, a-a *sad* thing. It's nice to not be forgotten."

Izuku personally doesn't see anything nice about this—this hurts him, and he's not technically a part of this. This is something he shouldn't even see. His Quirk has given him something no one else has, and in that, it's also opened up a world of hurt that he's never even thought could exist.

He aches for both his guardians and the ghost before him. This is... it sucks. He hates this.

"I'm sorry," Izuku croaks out when he can't find anything else to say.

Oboro cocks his head in Izuku's direction, expression brightening a little from the contemplative frown he's been wearing. "It's not all bad," the ghost tells him softly, smile a little fond. "Everyone still gets together for me—every year. Like Sho and 'zashi sometimes host our other school friends, and my birthday is the only time a year my family all gets together."

"Really?" Izuku sniffles, frowning at Oboro's broadening smile.

"Yep!" He nods enthusiastically, "I have three brothers and two sisters. They're all older than me. Then there's my parents, and I have nieces and nephews now too! After I died, they... my parents moved the family away and it's, uh, well, it's a commute, even for a ghost; but since they all meet up, I try to go too when I remember it's my birthday, so I can check up on everyone and... and see the new family members if there are any new babies."

"That sounds... it sounds nice," Izuku swallows. "That's a big family."

"Yeah," the ghost gives an enthusiastic nod, shooting Izuku a dopey

grin. “But a big family means they never really have a chance to get everyone together for anything, but every year, without fail, they get together for me. I’m glad that I’m a part of that, even if I’m not actually a part of it. It’s a little sad, I know they m-miss me too, but it’s not like my friends get. Kids are preceptive, and my family tries to make me a happy memory for the little ones.”

“That’s sweet,” Izuku can’t help but smile. “Does that mean you’re going to visit them then?”

“If you don’t mind?” Oboro cocks his head, “Sho and ‘zashi are… we were close—not to say I wasn’t close to my family, but I think I—my death—hit them differently. I don’t… really know how they’ll be. Sometimes they have a couple drinks, sometimes they’re just… blah, I guess? It depends on the day really. Will you be okay if I go?”

“It’s your birthday,” Izuku reminds with a smile. “You do what you want. I trust them, and however they need to cope is alright with me. I mean, worse comes to worst I just hang out in here, right?”

“If you’re sure,” Oboro narrows his eyes, scanning Izuku up and down as if searching for any hesitance. “I’ll be back in a couple hours. With the kids around no one stays out to late, y’know?”

Izuku nods, finally opening his jelly pouch and taking a couple slurps of it, “take your time. Have fun! Maybe you can tell me about your family later if you want? I love learning about Quirks.”

“Yeah, sure!” The ghost chirps, almost vibrating with enthusiasm. “I’ll keep an eye out for any cool Quirks the little ones might have! I’m sure there’s some awesome ones!”

Oboro’s gotten off the bed at this point, jumping around the room like an over excited toddler. He’s grinning—a bright contrast to his earlier look when he’d realized what day it is by nothing more than a glance at Izuku’s teacher’s states.

The ghost gives Izuku an enthusiastic wave before he blinks out of existence leaving Izuku alone with a cat glaring skeptically at where the ghost had just been.

Izuku lets out a laugh as he brushes Fish’s ears back.

For a while after getting the jelly pouch, Izuku stays in his room with Blanket and Fish. The cats seem content to just laze on the bed, and

even Nemo paws under the door in a request to be a part of it; Izuku thinks she might be mad that Shota isn't giving her as much attention as she's used to receiving from him.

Izuku's not sure how the cat knows the ghost is gone, but he doesn't hesitate to open the door to let her in, taking a second to peer out and see if he can hear and see anything from his guardians.

He can't.

He doubts they've moved from the kitchen table.

He works on his homework until it's all finished—or, most of it is, at least. He's having a little trouble with the English concepts they'd been assigned, but Izuku will definitely not be bothering Hizashi with it today. Not after hearing just why his teachers appeared so... off.

When his homework is finished, Izuku eases back in the chair, staring up at the ceiling as he lets a heavy sigh rattle out of his lungs. It's nearing lunchtime now.

Izuku's debating leaving his guardians to grieve the birthday of their school friend alone. There's not really a lot he can say or do in this situation without outing himself and his odd Quirk. He doesn't want to do that, but he also doesn't want to butt his head into something that he shouldn't be a part of because technically he doesn't really know Oboro—or the Oboro that his teachers know, at least.

Still, he knows he can't just stay in his room the whole day. He doesn't want to upset his guardians more, and he knows not eating will do that. He'd gotten lucky when it came to no one mentioning the jelly pouch for breakfast, but he's sure they'll have complaints if he doesn't eat anything for lunch.

So, with another, breathier and more anxious, sigh, the teen eases his door open.

None of the cats stir, but he still leaves the door an inch or so open so no one feels trapped. Because they will scream.

The apartment is still quiet, but a quick glance down at the end of the hallway shows his guardian's bedroom door still open, meaning they're probably still in the main living area.

Izuku pauses at the end of the hallway, frowning at his teachers. They've moved into the living room now, settled on the couch

together. Shota is sprawled stomach down along the couch with his face buried in Hizashi's lap. Hizashi is slumped down too, elbow resting on the armrest of the couch with the side of his jaw cradled in his palm.

The tv is on, mumbling softly, but neither seems to be watching it.

Izuku realizes with a start that the photo of Oboro, the one he'd found on the shelf of the three of them together, is now on the coffee table lying face down like neither of them can bear to look at it. He wonders for just a second why the photo is even down if they just laid it face down, but he knows loss is a messy emotion.

The thought tugs at the teenager's heart strings.

Izuku sucks in a breath and holds it as to not disturb them as he slips into the kitchen.

He scrounges around in the fridge, pulling out some leftover onigiri that Hizashi had made for bento lunches the day prior. He takes a bite of the rice ball as he sets to work grabbing the kettle. Tea sounds nice. Maybe some green tea, or perhaps matcha tea if he can find it.

He hesitates for just a second before moving swiftly to the doorway. It takes more effort than it probably should for the teenager to open his mouth and actually let *sounds* come out, "w-would, uhm," Izuku swallows as Hizashi's gaze sweeps towards him, and even Shota's head angles up a little so his chin is digging into Hizashi's thigh, "would you guys like some tea?"

"Tea?" Shota's voice comes out gravelly, one eyebrow arching.

"U-uh," Izuku taps a finger against his thigh, "you guys are just... well, you're sad, right? It's just, I ah, used to... I mean, when my mom was... w-when she was upset, I would bring h-her tea and it would help her fe-feel better...?"

Izuku stares down at the ground as he clenches his hands into fists at his sides. There's a stretch of silence that feels like it drags on—but Izuku knows it's probably no longer than a second, maybe two. He doesn't know why he's so anxious. These are his teachers—and literally the worst outcome here is them declining the offer.

But he's apparently worried for nothing.

"I'd love some tea, Kiddo," Hizashi straightens up a little, his smile

coming off a bit more naturally than it had earlier. Izuku finds himself returning it.

Shota lets out a sigh, shifting so he's on his side instead of his stomach, head still pillowed in Hizashi's lap, "yeah, kid," the man runs a hand through his hair, "thanks."

Izuku nods quickly, retreating to the kitchen.

He finishes off his rice ball between gathering the tea, mugs and sweeteners and waiting for the kettle to boil.

Izuku has seen the men drinking tea a couple times since he started staying here with them, and memorizing little things about people—like what they like in their tea, or coffee—is something Izuku has always been good at, so he doesn't even need to ask how they like it. Surprisingly, Shota likes black tea with a frankly worrying amount of sweetener, whereas Hizashi prefers herbal teas sweetened faintly with honey.

'It's good for the vocal cords!' Hizashi had told him enthusiastically one of the first days Izuku stayed with them. Izuku thinks Hizashi must know all the tips and tricks for keeping your throat healthy. He wonders briefly how Hizashi's Quirk influences his vocal cords—does it require special care? Is the strain bad when he overuses his Quirk? Would his Quirk still work if he lost his voice... *can he lose his voice?*

Izuku shakes himself from his thoughts as he settles on herbal tea for himself—a green tea blend.

He drops two green tea bags into the mugs, one that Hizashi uses every morning, and the other a mug he'd found shoved into the back of the cupboard. The third mug, a mug with little paw prints and a parade of cats circling the entirety of the mug that Shota tends to use, gets a black tea bag.

When the kettle is boiling, Izuku pours it over the tea bags and give all three a stir before leaving them to steep. Shota like his tea the same when he likes his coffee—bitter. It's contradicted by the spoonful of sugar and the splash of cream he likes, as opposed to the straight up black coffee he drinks.

Izuku himself likes his tea to be a little weak, so it's the first teabag he removes. He spoons some honey into his mug and takes a sip as he waits for the other two mugs. Hizashi likes his tea to steep for the allotted time on the box, so when the however many minutes pass,

Izuku removes Hizashi's as well and adds the faintest amount of honey to his mug.

He removes Shota's last, adding in the sugar and cream before grabbing both his guardian's mugs and walking carefully into the living room. Shota has sat up now, but he's still tucked into Hizashi's side; the blond's arm hooked over Shota's shoulders as his thumb brushes along his collarbone.

Izuku pretends he's not surprised that his stony-faced, grumpy teacher is this much of a cuddler as he sets the two mugs on the coffee table. He gets two thank yous; one from Hizashi, accompanied with a wide, thankful smile, while Shota's comes out gruff and exhausted, but with just as much gratitude.

He makes a beeline back into the kitchen, grabbing his own tea before pausing in the doorway.

"You're welcome to join us, Problem Child," Izuku startles at Shota's monotone voice. The teen's attention shoots between the couch where Hizashi is glancing back at him while Shota sips at his mug of tea, and the hallway leading to the bedrooms.

"A-are you sure?" Izuku squeaks out, shifting his weight from foot to foot, "I don't want to... I don't mind staying in my room if-if you guys need to be a-alone or—"

"Nonsense, Listener," Hizashi shakes his head, another soft but honest smile on his face, "we're not gonna force you to come out if you don't want to, but don't isolate yourself just because you think we want you to. We won't, and never will, send you away for any reason; sad or not, ya'dig?"

"This is your home too, Kid," Shota huffs out over the rim of his mug. "You're welcome anywhere at any time. We enjoy your company, Problem Child. Don't feel like you have to do anything to please us, just know you're always invited to join us whenever you'd like."

"Right," Hizashi gives a firm nod of agreement, "and if we did want to be alone, which may happen at some point, we'd do so in our room. You're always allowed out here; in the living room, in the kitchen. That said, never hesitate to come to us if you need us, Listener!"

"Just knock first if we're in our room," Shota's lip curls into a tiny smirk, and Izuku doesn't want to think too much about the smirk means, especially when Hizashi squawks and lightly smacks at Shota's

shoulder. “What?” Shota’s tone has a playful drawl, undeterred by his husband as he hides a small smile behind his mug, “it’s common curtesy to knock, isn’t it?”

“Don’t say things like that!” Hizashi glares playfully at Shota, pinching at the dark-haired man’s shoulder lightly.

“I literally didn’t say anything bad,” Shota snorts into his cup, smile never waning. “It was solid advice.”

“Maybe not, but you *implied* it,” the blonde pouts, “not to mention you definitely *thought* something bad, and around our *child* too! You spend way too much time with Nemuri!”

“I’m not the one who invites her over all the time, so that’s on you, ‘zashi.”

Izuku can’t help the soft exhale of laughter—which brings him back to how he’s awkwardly stood in the doorway clutching a mug of tea. He doesn’t really want to head back to his room. It’s a little boring, and without Oboro, he’s kinda lonely. It’s very rare for Izuku to be completely alone these days, and he’s really not sure what to do with himself when he is.

So that fleeting thought seals his decision for him. He takes slow, hesitant steps into the living room, settling himself on the loveseat. Neither guardian pays him much attention as he does so, and he’s glad. He’s honestly waiting for them to tell him they’ve changed their minds and either they leave, or ask him to leave, but it doesn’t happen.

The TV is playing some show Izuku’s never seen before. The volume is on low, murmuring faintly in the background. The three of them sit in comfortable silence, all sipping at their teas.

“So, Listener…” Izuku looks up from his mug to see the two of them looking at him. He shifts a little, but cocks his head in question, “since this is your home too now, we were wondering how you’d feel if we invited someone over later? We usually… this time of year we have a couple friends over….”

Izuku blinks, looking between the two of them.

“It’s your call,” Shota continues with a halfhearted one-shouldered shrug, “we understand this is a lot to adjust to, and you deserve some peace and quiet in your new environment. Nemuri won’t mind, and if

she does, we can always meet her somewhere else or head to her place. You have a say here, Problem Child."

Izuku pauses, eyes drifting down to his tea in thought. He really has no right to deny them this—wouldn't even if he truly trusted their words. They could tell him it's just as much his home as theirs, but it's really not true.

And besides all that, he'd *never* deny them this.

It's the birthday of their high school friend who lost his life. It's Oboro's birthday. Oboro had told him that his school friends got together to remember him and be together.

"I don't mind," Izuku shakes his head, "did you want me to leave? I, uh, I could catch the train to Kacchan's house for a few hours?"

"No," Shota responds far too quickly, studying the teenager, "I feel like you missed the first half of this conversation; we're asking because we want your honest opinion, Kid. We want to know if you're comfortable with her coming here while you're still here. And I prefer you have as little one on one interaction with Bakugou as possible, for my own peace of mind."

"You'll never need to leave for any reason, Sunshine," Hizashi frowns, "You don't have to say yes if you're not comfortable with it. No one will be upset."

"I really don't mind," Izuku tells them honestly, thumb tracing a line along the mug in his hands. "I just thought... m-maybe you guys would want to be alone because of—um, because you, uh, you're s-sad?"

Izuku stiffens when he realizes he almost blew his own cover.

He'd almost let slip that he knew why they were sad when neither told him. He doesn't want them to think he's been snooping—or worse, think there's something wrong with him like the ability to see ghosts or something. Well, that's a bit farfetched, even if it is the truth. No one believes that.

His guardians share a look, before both are glancing at him again. Neither say anything, but they don't stop looking at him. Like they're trying to understand him, or see some underlying hesitance in his words that's not there.

“Is... is there a reason today is a sad day?” Izuku asks quietly, staring down at the rippling liquid in his mug. He jerks his attention up when he realizes what he’d asked, “I mean, you don’t have to tell me anything if you don’t want! I was just curious, b-because you’re both upset and... and I don’t know. I don’t know how to help.”

They stare for a second longer before Hizashi looks away abruptly. He shifts a little before looking back at Izuku with a look that’s similar to the one from this morning, but less... raw? “Today is the birthday of someone who is... *was*... very important to us.”

“Was?” Izuku swallows, hooking one ankle over the other as he inches forwards towards the edge of the loveseat.

“He died,” Shota shakes his head, voice devoid of any emotion. “A long time ago.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, Listener,” Hizashi shoots him a light smile. “Like Sho said, it was a long time ago. It just gets a bit rough this time of year—he was our best friend. He, well,” Hizashi rubs the back of his neck with a fond laugh, “he’s the reason Sho and I even became friends, let alone the one to play matchmaker for us. He was very important to us.”

And yeah, that sounds a lot like Oboro; sticking his nose in other people’s business with the best of intentions. Izuku almost smiles.

“He sounds like a good friend,” Izuku offers lightly, and he knows the words to be true. He’d only known Oboro for a short amount of time, but he really was a good friend.

“He was,” Shota bows his head, leaning forwards to pick the photo frame up off the coffee table. He stares down at it for a second before handing it to Hizashi. The blond looks for a long second too before stretching in order to pass it to Izuku.

A small part of Izuku feels strangely honored that they’re trusting him with this—that they’re letting him in and sharing something, someone, so important to them. He takes the frame into his hands like it’s a crown jewel and finds a tiny smile curling onto his lips as he focuses on Oboro’s grinning face.

“I’m sure you can tell which one he is,” Shota huff with an edge of sad humor. The dark-haired man is glaring down into his drink as he speaks while Hizashi is watching Izuku with a fond look. “Izuku, meet

Shirakumo Oboro."

Izuku thumbs the edge of the frame, studying the photo for a second time. This time it doesn't feel like he's prying. It feels like he's a part of this now. It's one thing to hear these things from a ghost, but it's another entirely to hear it from someone living. To be let in on something special instead of fed information and stories from a ghost.

"What do you guys usually do for his birthday?" Izuku asks softly, looking up from the frame.

"Drink," comes Shota's answer.

"We don't—w-well, yeah, I guess we do. We've made it tradition to invite our school friends, Nemuri and Tensei, over because they were close with Oboro too. And we do usually drink, but we won't be this year."

"Why not?" Izuku cocks his head.

"Because we have you, Problem Child," Shota snorts into his sip of tea. "Can't very well get wasted with a minor in the house. That's something no one needs to see; especially someone under legal age."

"We don't get wasted!" Hizashi yelps, glaring at Shota, "we have a couple drinks and then usually crash. Nem and Tensei sometimes spend the night, but this year we don't even have the space for that either. Not to mention Tensei's in the hospital still, so it'll just be Nem coming over."

Izuku doesn't pry into that, no matter how much he wants too. "But I don't mind you guys drinking if you want. You shouldn't change things for me; you... you do this every year."

"I mind," Shota shrugs.

"I do too," Hizashi frowns. "And we're not changing it just for you, Kiddo, it'll be different this year anyways. Besides, I have patrol tomorrow morning, so I can't drink a lot anyways."

"Well..." Izuku frowns thoughtfully, "what will you guys do instead then?"

The two Pro heroes exchange a look. Hizashi frowns as Shota's shoulder lift in a tired shrug. "That's a good question, Listener," Hizashi shakes his head. "We'll probably just talk... maybe watch

Oboro's favorite movie again or something."

"You should bake a cake."

For a second, Izuku doesn't even realize it had been him who'd said it.

And it sounds dumb. And his teachers are now looking at him like he'd grown a second head. Izuku feels an embarrassed flush wash over his cheeks as he abruptly drops his attention down to his lukewarm tea.

"Cake...?" Shota sits up a little more, a curious twinge to his monotone voice. "Why?"

"It's a, um, it's a birthday?" Izuku frowns. He feels really childish now. "It's hardly a birthday without a cake."

"You want us to make a birthday cake?" Hizashi asks slowly, pushing his glasses up his nose when they start to slip. He's watching Izuku still, head angled like the teen is a complex puzzle he doesn't understand.

"W-well," Izuku ducks his head, fingers tensing around the rim of his mug, "just, when I was little, m-my grandma died, and we were really close, so... so when her birthday rolled around, I was devastated. We baked the same cake every year for her, and she'd come over and we'd celebrate, and then suddenly she was gone, and I-I was so sad." Izuku pauses, looking up for a second before looking away again, "my mom, uh, sh-she insisted we still, y'know, make a cake. So w-we did. We still baked a birthday cake, and decorated it, and wrote her name on it in icing, and then we ate it while thinking about her and t-telling stories about her?"

Izuku shakes his head, nose scrunching up as he glares down into his drink, "sorry, it's dumb."

"It's not," Hizashi shakes his head with a little smile, "that's really cute, Sunshine. And you want us to make a cake for Oboro?"

Izuku gives a little sheepish nod, "it was just nice to enjoy something she loved, even if she wasn't around. I, uhm, I think it helped me grieve?"

And it's only a bit of a lie. Or... actually, it was entirely a lie.

The truth was, Izuku had never met any of his grandparents.

They'd all passed on before he was born, and as far as he knew, none of them hung around in the real world. He feels bad lying to his teachers, making up the heartfelt story, but he knows it's an element of closure both sides need.

Normally, he'd never offer something like this up. It sounded silly—but he knew Oboro was still hanging around. He knew his teachers were grieving still. He knew that even if Oboro couldn't share this—the cake, their company— in its entirety, that the ghost would be touched at the little details.

He wanted Oboro to feel special. To feel remembered on his birthday and make it into something light and happy instead of dark and sad.

Izuku wants to do something nice for Oboro. He sees the way the ghost views this—the grief, and sadness. His friends being sad and hurt over him; that's a feeling that no one likes. It sucks. Oboro had been so dejected that morning when he's realized it was his birthday, and Izuku wants to change that. Birthdays are supposed to be happy.

Maybe he can make this hurt a little less for his teachers. For the ghost.

And cake is a great way to do it.

Shota is quiet for a second. Thoughtful gaze studying the teenager. Izuku almost wants to shrink under his teacher's gaze, but he just pretends not to notice it. The boy thinks his homeroom teacher is trying to figure out how to say no without hurting Izuku's feelings, so the boy is thrown for a loop when instead his teacher looks towards Hizashi, "what was that cake Oboro loved so much?"

"My mom's chocolate cake," Hizashi laughed, sinking back into the couch with a wide grin, "I forgot how much he loved that cake—how many slices did he eat the first time he had it again?"

"Your mother cut him off at four, and then he threw up after Nem bet him that he couldn't do a flip on one of his clouds. He almost dropped himself on his head."

"Right!" Hizashi chokes on a hearty laugh, smacking the arm of the couch as he laughs, "then he ate another slice too, didn't he?"

"No," Shota shakes his head, a tiny smile curling onto his lips, "the asshole ate *my* slice."

“He ate more cake after throwing up?” Izuku lets himself smile. He can see it. That sounds like a very Oboro thing. This also sounds like a very Oboro thing that Oboro would never tell Izuku himself, so he’s glad to hear it. “He sounds really fun.”

Izuku knows it to be true—but it’s still nice hearing stories of his friend. It’s like friends of you friend telling you stories about your friend, but in Izuku’s case, it’s a bit messier. The friends of his friend are his teachers who’re currently fostering him, and who have no idea that Izuku had somehow befriended their dead friend.

“He was,” Hizashi’s smile turns reminiscent.

His teachers exchange yet another glance, this time it’s softer and it’s almost like they’re having a conversation with their eyes. Finally, Shota speaks again, the corners of his lips curled into a small, real smile, “still have your mother’s recipe?”

“Yep!” Hizashi grins, “and the chocolate fudge icing too! The cake is incomplete without it, my mother’s rules!”

“Well,” Shota moves to stand off the couch, Hizashi following his lead, “let’s get to baking before Nem arrives and fucks up our kitchen in an attempt to help.” Izuku stands to disappear into his room, ready to let his guardians do this alone when, almost as if predicting Izuku’s actions, Shota glances back at the teen, “c’mon, Problem Child. Your idea, your cake.”

Izuku grins as he turns towards the kitchen instead of the hallway leading to the bedrooms, following his teachers into the kitchen to make a birthday cake for their dead friend, and Izuku’s ghost friend.

What a sentence.

Baking with his guardians proved to be a lot of fun.

The recipe was simple to follow, and it was nice to see his guardians working together in perfect harmony to bake a cake.

Izuku helps too—mostly with mixing the batter which is honestly the best job anyways. Plus, he gets to lick the whisk (Shota encourages him, and Hizashi whines about him getting sick from raw eggs and uncooked flour).

They make the icing while the cake is in the oven baking. Izuku licks

the whisk again when they're finished making the icing too, but this time neither guardian has any complaints (and it would be hypocritical to have any complaints, considering Hizashi and Shota are both taking turns dipping their fingers in the empty mixing bowl).

Izuku is glad to see neither looks as sad as they had before. They're laughing and talking. Telling Izuku about Oboro and sharing little details with each other about their cloud-haired friend. It's nice hearing things from someone other than Oboro, he likes that they're letting him in and being almost vulnerable around him—which is something Izuku would've never thought his homeroom teacher would ever do.

Izuku listens intently as Hizashi raves about their school days with the cloudy-haired teen; Hizashi had apparently met Oboro first at the start of their first year, and Oboro had coerced Shota into being his friend when the dark-haired man had first joined the Heroics Course after their own Sports Festival.

The friendship had taken a bit of work, especially when it came to roping Shota, who sounds like he wasn't much different back then to what he is now, into it.

Izuku likes this. He likes seeing them like this. He likes talking about Oboro, even if he has to play dumb a bit. He likes that they're not upset—and he knows Oboro will get a kick out of this as well. He can't wait to see the ghost's face when he gets back.

His guardian's friend Nemuri (*Midnight!*) arrives before Oboro returns. She lets herself in and comes bearing take-away for dinner, and a bottle of wine that Hizashi takes from her and sets aside.

Izuku is surprised to see her. She looks way different out of her hero costume, just like Hizashi. She's wearing more clothes than Izuku has ever seen; a long-sleeved shirt, and a pair of tight fit jeans. She's got a pair of regular glasses and her hair is tied up in a neat bun. She's very pretty.

It takes a bit longer to place the civilian to the hero costume than it had with Hizashi and his Present Mic get up, but Izuku comes to the conclusion after just a couple minutes with the woman. Izuku's child self would probably have passed out at this point, surrounded by three Pro Heroes who're all comfortable enough around him to let their guards down.

"I guess we're keeping this get together PG if this little cutie is

hanging out with us," Nemuri pouts theatrically as she steps into the kitchen. "And do I smell Yamada-san's chocolate cake?"

"We told you the Listener would be here," Hizashi reminds with a playful grin, "and *yeahhh*! We're trying something new this year, eh, Kiddo? Oboro's favorite."

Nemuri's face twists into a sad frown for just a second before she's giving them a sly grin; going along with the idea without a second thought, "are you sure it's still his favorite after spewing three slices worth of it in the grass?"

"Four," Shota chimes gruffly, sticking his frosting covered finger in his mouth before continuing, "and he did eat my piece afterwards."

Izuku thinks his homeroom teacher may be harboring a bit of a grudge about Oboro's cake stealing. Just how good is this cake? Shota continues as Izuku drags his thoughts back to the cake, and the bustling of teachers around him. "I think it's safe to assume he'd still love it."

"Seconded," Hizashi raises his hand after slipping his hands into a set of oven mitts, "I've been eating this cake for thirty years and it's still one of my favorites."

The oven timer chimes and Nemuri cheers as Hizashi pulls the cakes from the oven. They look really nice, and the room smells of sweet chocolate. The cakes are fluffy and they've risen nicely; Izuku can't wait to taste the finished product.

They can't do much more while the cakes are still hot, since they'll melt the icing if they do.

Izuku disappears into his room so the Pros can talk without Izuku around. He has no doubt Midnight-Sensei, no, *auntie Nem*, as she'd requested to be called (Izuku just knows his face had turned tomato red as he'd averted his eyes from the woman), much to Hizashi and Shota's chagrin, is curious about the abrupt change in their usual plans when it comes to celebrating Oboro's birthday.

Izuku lays on the bed with Fish and Nemo, scrolling through his phone as he waits. Blanket had left to greet the visitor, but the other two cats had remained in place. The cake has probably cooled now, and he assumes his teachers are all icing the cake if the voice of varying levels of annoyance and humor are anything to go off.

“Honey, I’m home!” Izuku looks up at Oboro’s cheerful call. Just a second later, the teen shivers as the ghost plops down on the bed beside him, “how’s it hanging, ‘zuku? Hope Sho and ‘zashi weren’t too depressing while I was gone. You haven’t been in here the whole time, have you?”

“Welcome back,” Izuku snorts as he pushes himself to a sitting position. “No, it’s been okay. They’re… okay, I guess? And I’ve been waiting for you to come back. I hope your family is all well.”

“They’re great,” Oboro’s grin brightens, “I have a new nephew! Cutest little guy around—they're all adorable, all those little ankle biters. I wish I could’ve actually met ‘em all, y’know? Anyways, it was great to see everyone! They’re a very lively bunch! And man, it was so much fun to see everyone hanging out, and the kids, they were just so full of energy—”

Izuku can’t help but smile as the ghost continues to talk on about his visit to his family. Oboro seems content to just talk to someone who can actually listen. Oboro talks so long that Izuku’s phone blacks out due to inactivity, but the green-haired teen can’t be bothered.

Oboro pauses in his story when he catches sight of Nemo, who’s pressed up against Izuku’s thigh, tail swishing as she glares at the ghost. He blinks at the cat before his smile widens, “there is only one person in the world that that cat hates more then she hates me, so if Nemo’s in here with me, that must mean…” Oboro jumps to his feet, “Nem’s here, isn’t she!”

“She is,” Izuku confirms, letting out a quiet laugh as he stands after the ghost. “But wait, before you head out there, there’s actually a… well, there’s a bit of a surprise for you?”

“For… me?” Oboro freezes where he’d been about to charge through the bedroom door and make his way into the kitchen. “I don’t know what that means, ‘zuku.”

“You'll like it," Izuku promises, giving the ghost a light smile as he opens the door for them. Izuku walks out with Oboro following hesitantly on his heels. He really hopes the ghost *does* like it.

The cake smells even better now, the sweet scent of chocolate icing aiding the rich chocolatey cake. Oboro pauses, gives a light sniff as his eyebrows furrow, “is that cake?”

Izuku just smiles as he bounds into the kitchen where his teachers are.

The cake is on the table now; the two cakes stacked on top of each other, fully iced. It's not neat or perfect, looking like it was just smoothed on with a butter knife, but it looks homemade and smells great. Besides, what's it matter what it looks like, when it tastes good, right?

Oboro freezes in the doorway as Izuku plants his palms on the table beside Hizashi, leaning over to look at the cake, "it looks great!" the teen chirps, smiling shyly at the adults.

Last time he'd seen it, it was still in the pans cooling. Now it's an actual cake!

"Don't lie to us, Problem Child," Shota drawls in the humored monotone. He glares down at the cake distastefully before sighing, "at least we know it tastes good."

"Hey!" Hizashi laughs heartily, standing from his seat to stare down at the cake like Izuku is, "I think it looks great too! The writing on top is just *perfect*."

The top of the cake has squiggles of deep blue gel icing. Izuku spots a small tube of the matching icing beside the cake, mostly empty. He hadn't seen it before, and honestly didn't know his guardians even had something like that, but he can't deny seeing Oboro's name in wide, loopy scrawl on the top of the cake doesn't make his heart warm.

"You're only saying that because you did it," Nemuri scoffs, one eyebrow arching in an unimpressed sort of way, "and I beg to differ. You wrote 'Happy' too big and had like no room for 'Birthday'— I mean, look at that, the a and the y are all squished together and tiny."

"But I fit Oboro just fine," the blond's lip juts out in a pout, finger pointing down and hovering over where 'Oboro' is written in wobbly squiggles. "I like it. And besides, I got to use that gel icing I bought for Sho's last birthday that he blatantly refused to eat if it was on his cake. It's a win all around. *And*," the man hums the word with a grin, "Oboro loves blue!"

"I do like blue," Oboro's voice comes out breathless. He hasn't moved. Hasn't stepped in. Hasn't even really seen the cake yet. He looks nervous, afraid to come in. Hesitant to join them despite the fact they're celebrating *him*. Izuku bite his lip as he subtle gestures the ghost in.

Oboro takes slow, measured steps into the room, hovering over

Izuku's shoulder. He doesn't touch him, but he's very close to hooking his chin over Izuku's shoulder. The height difference between them is the only saving grace.

"It doesn't look *awful*," Shota concedes, frown still present, "but it is a mess."

"It's beautiful," Oboro breathes out just as the words leave Shota's mouth, voice sounding wobbly. Izuku is sure if he were to look over his shoulder, the ghost's expression would match the catch in his voice. "It's... it's beautiful. You got them to... you guys made... it's really for me?"

"Sure, it's a bit of a mess," Nemuri shrugs as she plops onto one of the chairs, "but so was Oboro. That idiot would've adored this mess of a cake, and we all know it. Well, maybe not you, Hon." Izuku almost huffs out in offense as Nemuri's fingers ruffle through his hair.

"Oh, the irony of that," Oboro snorts a laugh into his fist, eyes still a little teary and voice crumbling no matter how hard he tries to keep it together. "I guess I can give credit for this one to you, eh, 'zuku?"

The teen's head dips faintly in a nod, which is followed by a light shrug.

A little, but he'd just sparked the idea. Shota and Hizashi had run with the idea, making Oboro's favorite and icing it together with their other friends for the sake of the ghost. He didn't want full credit for this when it wasn't about him in the slightest. He's just glad that everything feels light, and the ghost has a grin on his face that is somehow the brightest Izuku has ever seen.

"I have never loved anything as much as I love this cake," the ghost coos, flashing Izuku a wide smile before stepping through the table and ducking down so his nose is almost pushed against the frosting on top.

It would be unsanitary if the ghost wasn't, y'know, a ghost.

"That's my name! Wow, it's been so long since I've seen it written out. I can't believe you got them to make me a cake! I can't believe you got Shota, Mr. Logic-and-rationality, to bake me a cake! Best ghost birthday ever!"

And now Izuku is smiling like an idiot, because he'd expected Oboro to be happy, but not this happy. Not genuinely ecstatic to see it. Still,

the thought and sight of Oboro so over the moon about this makes Izuku feel all warm and squishy.

The cake is such a small thing, tiny in comparison to extravagant birthday parties, or big get togethers for someone's birthday. It had taken no more than a couple hours from start to finish, but it had made Oboro giddy. It had completely cheered the ghost up, not to mention livened the whole apartment. Everyone seemed in better spirits.

Shota insisted they eat real food, the take out Nemuri bought, before they ate the cake.

Nemuri groaned, and called the two men boring dads (and Izuku's cheeks definitely did not flush red at her words, no matter what a chortling Oboro has to say about it), but they did all settle down to eat.

Conversations continued, mostly revolving around Oboro. Nemuri had some interesting stories of the cloudy-haired teenager too, and Izuku was happy to listen. She was a year ahead of Oboro, Hizashi and Shota, but they were all close friends.

"He walked directly into my homeroom Sensei, because he was too busy trying to keep pace with me," Nemuri laughed, sipping at the wine she'd brought. Shota and Hizashi had caved, each having a glass as well after making sure Izuku was fine with it. And of course, he was. "Sensei was so mad, and all Oboro could do was stumble over his words—I swear he said sorry three times before fleeing the room like a dog with his tail between his legs. I'm surprised the poor kid didn't wet himself."

"It wasn't *that* bad," Oboro pouts, looking at Izuku. "But to plead my case, 3-A's homeroom teacher that year was Pro Hero: Pride, with that scary lion mutation Quirk. He was so possessively protective of his class, and had very large teeth."

Izuku tried really hard not to laugh, stifling it into his sleeve.

"To be fair," Hizashi snickers, "Pride-Sensei never did like Oboro."

"Yeah, 'cause he was always hanging around our classroom when he wasn't being an idiot with you two. Or riding those clouds everywhere. Nezu used to get so pissed when he saw Oboro on his clouds."

“He only hung around because he liked you,” Shota teases, lip remaining in a straight line despite the tone. “He was willing to risk his life intruding in Pride-Sensei's classroom just to talk with you.”

“He did?” Izuku squawks, attention shooting to the ghost, who suddenly has more colour on his cheeks.

“Now that you mention it,” Nemuri lets out another laugh, “yeah, that would explain it. He was like my shadow whenever he was around. He really was sweet though.”

Izuku still hadn’t dragged his gaze away from the flushing ghost.

“Hey,” Oboro pouts when he catches Izuku’s gaze, smile still bright on his face despite the pink crawling up his features, “she was an upperclassman who was nice and pretty, sue me. I’m pretty sure Nem had our whole class, excluding those two lovesick idiots, drooling whenever she stepped into the room.”

Oboro pauses for a second, a small smile curling onto his lips, “she thinks I’m sweet.”

Izuku does accidentally let a laugh out at the dopey lull in his voice, ducking his head as he does so.

“That was pretty bad,” Hizashi hums thoughtfully, smile turning mischievous, “but what about when Oboro came into class soaking wet and proceeded to shed all of his clothes, right in the middle of the classroom with our Sensei in the room!”

“R-really?” Izuku can’t help but squeak, second hand embarrassment lifting onto his own cheeks as he chances a glance back at a smug looking Oboro.

“I’m not a prude,” the ghost shrugs, a toothy smile on his face. He doesn’t look embarrassed at all, just proud. “And I covered all the goods with a cloud; so, no one saw anything... I think? Not that it woulda mattered, I ain’t shy!”

“What?!” Nemuri is bent over laughing, “no one told me that!”

“Oh yeah,” Shota hums, a tiny smile on his face as he recalls the event, “that was the day he found Sushi. Came in late; soaked from the rain and stripped down to nothing but that customary censor cloud he made. That idiot.”

“Sensei was so done with him,” Hizashi manages out between booming laughter. It’s very close to being Quirk active, but it doesn’t get to that point. “Man, I wish I had that kinda confidence, I mean our *whole* class was in the room!”

“It’s a gift,” Oboro drawls in a tease.

Izuku covers his own face in second hand embarrassment that Oboro isn’t even first-hand embarrassed about, and it had been him who’d done it. His confidence really is unrivalled, Izuku’s not sure even Kacchan would have the gall to do that, and he’s the most confident person Izuku has ever known.

It’s not long after dinner is cleared away that the four of them (and the ghost) are preparing for the cake that had been waiting on the counter. Oboro is stood behind Izuku’s chair, leaning on the back of his chair as he stares at the cake with a small smile as the teenager grabs forks for the group. Hizashi is grabbing plates.

Izuku freezes when he notices a small package of candles in the utensil drawer that had obviously been dropped in at some point and forgotten about. He runs a finger over the box before grabbing it and the four forks he’d been directed to grab before returning to the table.

“Can we light a candle too?” he bounds over to Shota, stopping just beside him. The man blinks in surprise before looking at first Hizashi, and then Nemuri. He looks like he wants to say no, but before he can, Izuku continues, “it’s not a birthday without a candle, is it?”

“You are really pushing your luck,” Oboro’s laugh is breathy, eyes tracking the candles hopefully despite his words.

Shota huffs out a breath through his nose before holding his hand out. “Just one.”

Izuku hasn’t felt this childish since he was a literally child. Since before he got his Quirk and he had all this for himself. He’s not sure why it feels so nice to do this for Oboro; to give him something he hasn’t had in years, but it does. And it makes him feel giddy.

The teen carefully places the package of candles in his guardian’s hand, and Shota easily opens the pack and selects one of the candles. He presses the candle into the cake between the words ‘Birthday’ and ‘Oboro’, the stands up and pulls open one of the drawers Izuku had never bothered looking in, and produces a lighter from it.

Shota and Hizashi settle at the table at the same time, Hizashi with the plates and a knife to cut the cake with, while Shota is thumbing at the lighter as he waits. When everyone is settled at the table, Shota finally leans forwards to light the single candle.

Izuku watches the small flame flicker before steadying out.

Everyone around the table just looks at the cake for a second, no one says anything. Not even Oboro who's eyes tract the flame's movements intently. His smile is nothing more than an upward curl of the corner of his mouth, but it's fond and heartening. It's not a big, flashy show smile, it's an innocent little thing.

"Who's going to blow it out?" Nemur asks after a second, looking between her two friends. They were always closer to Oboro.

"Me!" the ghost hoots, and it takes everything in Izuku not to look over his shoulder at the ghost who sucks in a deep breath before leaning over Izuku and blowing hard. Izuku will give him credit for the fact the flame does flicker as if a breeze has swept over it, but it doesn't go out. "Awh."

Oboro lets out a huff before leaning even closer to the cake, one arm stretched out before the him, while the other supports him by his forearm resting along the length of the back of Izuku's chair. The teen holds his breath as the ghost concentrates on the flame, fingers circling around it before he pinches the wick.

And the candle goes out.

Hizashi jumps in surprise as a small stream of smoke lifts from the smothered flame, and Nemuri's chair scratches faintly on the floor as she pushes back in surprise. Shota's eyes widen a fraction, but he doesn't move.

"I did it," Oboro puffs out his chest, clearly proud.

"What the—"

"Burr," Izuku gives a fake little shiver, followed by a real one as the ghost resumes his close position and surrounds the teen with his ghostly chill, "the candle must've got caught in that breeze."

"Breeze?" Shota looks around the room with narrowed eyes, gaze catching on the teen again when he can't find a source for the breeze, "from where?"

Izuku opens his mouth to answer, but promptly shuts it instead, answering with a shrug. There are no open windows— not windows in the kitchen at all, so he doesn't know what he could blame, so it's better to keep his mouth shut.

“Well... now no one has to blow it out,” Nemuri laughs, though she still looks a little startled by the candle going out on its own by a breeze no one felt but the teenager.

“Y’know, I’m just gonna believe Oboro did it,” Hizashi lets out a laugh, brushing the incident off a lot easier than Nemuri. “Happy birthday, Buddy!”

Izuku almost chokes on his own spit, and he feels the ghost lose his lean on the solid backrest of the chair, flailing around as he falls through faintly before catching himself and pushing up to stare in awe at his blonde school friend.

“That’s literally impossible,” Shota shakes his head, lips pulling into a frown. “Illogical.”

“But it’s a nice thought, isn’t it?” Hizashi coos, crossing his arms across his chest defiantly, “besides, it was perfect timing. Oboro blew that candle out, you can’t change my mind; not with your silly logic, Sho-chan.”

“Believe what you want,” the underground hero sighs, still looking at the candle like it was about to suddenly relight without any intervention from them. “And don’t call me that.”

“Sourpuss,” Nemuri snorts into her glass of wine. “Someone cut the cake already. It’s been years since I’ve had a slice of Yamada-san's cake; I’m long overdue for a foodgasm.”

“A... what?” Izuku blinks at the woman. Hizashi gives the woman a shove, shooting her a death glare as Shota just drops his head into his hands.

“Don’t teach him things like that!” Hizashi scolds.

“What? It’s not like I’m talking about my other favorite *gasm*~” the woman purrs out, just to get a rise out of the blonde, who squawks and flaps his arms in disbelief.

“Nemuri,” Shota huffs out through his palms. He suddenly sounds exhausted, “I swear to God...”

“Fine, fine,” the woman gives a bright laugh, sipping her wine once again, “someone cut the cake already then.”

Izuku retires to his room when Shota and Hizashi do. Nemuri had left a while before, complaining about an early morning patrol and needed a good night’s sleep to be on her game for it. Izuku had hung around with his guardians to help with clean up and washing dishes. They'd told him he didn't need to, but he's insisted on helping.

They’d quieted down a little, not quite as upbeat and cheerful anymore. The grief was slowly returning, but it was a half thought instead of constant. They were still sad, and Izuku knew they always would be no matter how they celebrated. He understood it.

He flops down on his bed, and groans into the pillow when a cold presence settles at his side.

“Thank you.”

Izuku rolls onto his side, hugging the stuffed cat his guardian’s had bought for him to his chest. “What for?”

“I know they wouldn’t have done this, made me a cake and... and *celebrated* me instead of *mourning* me, if it wasn’t for you. So... so thanks. It was amazing. I haven’t felt that included—*alive*—in years.”

“I’m glad you had a good birthday,” the teen replies, letting his eyes slip shut. He feels the smile twisting his lips and doesn’t even attempt to hide it. He’s very happy Oboro had a good day.

“I did,” Izuku can hear the smile in Oboro’s voice. “There’s only one thing that could make this birthday even better.”

“Oh yeah?” Izuku hums out, slivering one eye open to glance at the ghost, “and what would that be?”

“A ride on one of my clouds!” the ghost cheers, head angling to look out the window. “I tell ya, ‘zuku, you haven’t seen stars until you’ve seen them from a cloud. It was always my favorite thing to do.”

“Really?” Izuku finds himself sitting up.

“Oh yeah,” the ghost gives a serious nod, shifting around so he’s sitting on the edge of the bed. “It’s just so calm up there. You don’t hear the city sounds, and no one bothers you. Plus, the stars are

gorgeous from up there, bright and up close. Sparkling. It's the best."

Oboro stares out the window for a second before he's slowly turning to Izuku. The teen blinks as Oboro's intense eyes focus on him, the ghost's smile stretching wider by the second, "have you ever, oh, I don't know, wanted to stargaze from a cloud?"

"Uhm," Izuku frowns, inching away from the ghost. He already knows where this is going—can see it just from the mischievous glint in Oboro's eyes. "I don't know?"

"Wouldn't it be fun?" The ghost bounces on the edge of the mattress, eyes sparkling and smile wide and toothy, "c'mon, it's my birthday?" the ghost's eyes turn pleading and his lip pokes out in a pout. "Pleaseee?"

"You just want to use your Quirk," Izuku groaned, burying his face into his pillow before scootching to the edge of the bed so he could plant his feet on the ground. "What if Shota and Hizashi come check on me, and I'm not here and they think I snuck out or something?"

"They won't," Oboro snorts, "they trust you. 'zashi's already getting ready for bed at this hour because of the early patrol, and Shota's marking your classes essays. And it's not like we'll be gone all night, it'll be an hour, tops. C'monnn! You're not gonna deny the ghost who's been *all alone* on his birthday for thirteen years this, are you?"

"Guilt tripping is not cool," Izuku pouts, but offers up his hand anyways. "An hour. And if I get caught sneaking out—I- well, I don't know what I'll do. I'll figure it out, but you'll be sorry!"

"Yess!" Oboro cheered as he stepped close to Izuku, hand clamping down on the green-haired teen's hand. The touch was instantaneous, and for a second Izuku was afraid at how easy it had become. Oboro was solid, pulling Izuku up by the hand and dragging him toward the window.

Somehow, Oboro managed to push the window open with just one hand, and then Izuku was gazing out at a large fluffy cloud. It was big enough to comfortably seat the two of them, but Izuku still hesitated.

"Y'know, if we accidentally let go, you'll probably float, because weightless ghost who has no solid form without me and all, but I, I will plummet to my death."

"We won't let go," Oboro huffs, a half amused, half annoyed look

lulling in Izuku's direction as he does so.

"That doesn't make me any more confident in this." Izuku shakes his head, "we're literally dangling my life from a cloud. You've seen how easy it is for us to lose contact—do you really want to do that in the *sky*?"

"Okay, okay, point made." Oboro thinks for a second before Izuku is being dragged to the wardrobe where his uniforms are hanging. The ghost tugs one of his red uniform ties down from the hanger, pushing up close to Izuku so their hips were touching before releasing the teen's hand.

Oboro makes quick work of knotting the tie around first his hand, then Izuku's. The ghost laces their fingers together without a word, wrapping the tie around their hands like an odd present of some sort.

The knots were almost tight enough to hurt, but he couldn't argue that they weren't secure.

Oboro gives a jolting tug of the bindings and Izuku stumbles at the force, tugged into Oboro's side. He glares at the ghost, but Oboro just looks smug as he lightly pushes Izuku back onto his own feet.

"There," Oboro gives a firm nod, inspecting his work, "nothing short of untying that will break the connection, and we can always have a second point of contact too, like our knees touching or something. Now," the ghost whines now, almost pleading, "can we gooo?"

"Yeah," Izuku swallows, glancing back at the cloud hovering completely still outside the window, "let's do it."

Oboro climbs onto the cloud first, looking entirely too giddy considering Izuku was walking onto something that was going to be taking him upwards and could literally blink out of existence with just one wrong move from the two of them.

Best not to think about that.

His steps are slow and cautious as he climbs out the window, heart thrumming with nerves and anxiety at being caught and the thrill of actually sneaking out and trusting not just his own ghost-seeing-and-sorta-using Quirk, but Oboro's own cloud Quirk too.

The ghost sinks down into a criss-cross sitting position, pulling Izuku down too. The teen melts into a similar position, squeezing at his

friend's hand.

"Relax," Oboro gives him a goofy half-smile, "I used to do this all the time. I won't let anything happen to you. Trust me."

And he does trust the ghost.

But he doesn't let up his grip.

The cloud is moving before Izuku really knows what's happening. They're going up—not like how they'd gone up and strayed to the side like at the USJ, no, they were really just going up like Izuku was on one big cottony elevator.

The higher they got, the harder his heart thrummed in his chest, pounding like it would beat right out of his ribcage. The wind ruffles through his curls, and his body gives a shiver at the late-night chill brushing against them. At his side, Oboro looks free and alive, a natural smile on his face and his eyes shut as he directs the cloud as if it's second nature. The ghost's head is angled upwards, chin raised as he accepts the wind and chill like it's a part of him.

Izuku doesn't doubt for a second that Oboro did this all the time when he was still alive. It's obvious the ghost missed this. Being free like this. Guiding his cloud where few could go. Being able to just hop onto a cloud and *go*.

Izuku looks down as the tall buildings get smaller and smaller. The cars below look like nothing but ants and the stray pedestrians wondering around can't even be picked up by his eyes.

Soon they're surrounded by natural clouds, which is where Oboro stops the movement. His eyes sliver open and his head angles towards Izuku, taking him in before his head is thrown back and he's staring up at the stars in awe.

"Look up," the ghost guides, his own hand giving Izuku's a light, prompting squeeze. "Pretty, huh?"

Izuku lets his head follow direction on autopilot, eyes lifting to the scattering of stars above. They really are beautiful. Twinkling like that nursey rhyme his mother used to sink to him. Glittering above.

He wishes he knew more about the stars. About constellations, and names—more than just the North Star that he couldn't even point out if he tried. It really is beautiful—a sight he's sure very few see like

this.

“Yeah,” Izuku hears himself say, unable to draw his eyes away. “Thanks for talking me into this.”

“Thanks for letting me talk you into this,” Oboro’s burst of laughter is what draws the teen’s gaze away from the sky. “This really was the best birthday I’ve had in ages. Thank you, Izuku.”

Izuku bows his head in acknowledgment, attention crawling back up to the sky, “I never did ask how old you turned,” the teen hums, “obviously older than me, but like, how old?”

“Thirty-one,” the ghost returns softly, just as distracted by the sky and the stars.

Izuku sputters, choking on the spit in his mouth. Oboro looks towards him in surprise, but has to bite his lip to keep from laughing at Izuku’s choking coughs and red cheeks.

“You’re old!” the teen accuses, disbelief furrowing his brow, “I forget you’re as old as my teacher, because you look, well, like that!”

“Izuku,” Oboro’s nose wrinkles as he grins. The green-haired teen can see the shit-eating grin on Oboro’s face even in the dark, that tongue in cheek smile, “Buddy, I’m *older* than your teachers.”

“You’re what?!”

Izuku chokes out a couple more exclamations that don’t quite for real words, but they’re drowned out by the ghost’s hearty laughter.

Izuku doesn’t even really complain when they stay out fifteen more minutes than Izuku had approved. He’s just glad to see Oboro smiling so much, and enjoying himself.

They really need to work with the ghost’s Quirk some more because this, this is *amazing*.

Chapter End Notes

> Hiya again! Sorry for this chapter being late, I've been sick for the past week because my family is rude and decided to drag me down with them! I had like no motivation for anything, but I did try to work on this so if things are worse than usual when it comes to editing, it's my sick brain going brrr.

Also I wanted to add that I'm completely making Oboro's life up because idk? I haven't read the vigilantes series yet (I'm literally just waiting for volume 1 to come in later this month, because the postal system sucks and my life is a joke that thinks it's funny to give me all the other books except the one I need to start reading). Inspiration of his family came from (or was brought to my attention by?): *f4nd0mwh0r3* who asked if he had family. I agree he definitely radiates sibling energy, so thanks for the question! I also made up Nemuri's teacher, and I'm awful at character creation? Also did it while sick, so apologies if it doesn't make sense?

I hope you guys liked this Oboro appreciation chapter, with cute erasermic dads, Izuku being an adorable little bean and Nemuri who I hope came off in character? Comments appreciated as always, and thank you so much to every one who's been interacting with this fic! It means the world to me that you guys are liking it too!

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello!
>
> Welcome back to another update! We've now hit to Hosu part of this fic! Be warned, I rewrote this by memory, so things will probably be different but follow the same general scenes. On that note, I can almost garantee conversation will differ completely because I do not remember any dialogue! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter, so I hope you guys like it too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Oboro's birthday, everything settles out again. Sunday comes and goes, and his guardians are back to normal. They're maybe a bit quieter, a bit more soft-spoken, but besides that, they're almost completely back to normal.

By Monday, you'd never be able to tell they'd spent the weekend mourning a close friend's birthday.

Izuku wonders briefly how his guardians would've been had Oboro's 31st birthday fallen on a school day. He assumes it has before—it the fifth can't fall on the weekend every year, right?

He can't imagine them staying home for the day, but also can't really imagine them showing up in as poor moods as they'd been that Saturday morning before Izuku had guided mourning into something a little lighter. He pities the classes who'd been stuck with Shota's short, grieving temper over the years. He hands out suicide sprints and lectures on the best of days, Izuku doesn't want to imagine Shota on the worst of days.

But that doesn't really matter now anyways; the day had passed and with it, so had their dour moods and sad thoughts. And Izuku thinks that the cake and light atmosphere as opposed to the usual quiet mourning may have helped.

Hizashi had been up and gone before Izuku had even rolled out of bed, Oboro tagging along with him, and Shota had been flopped on the couch with a mug of steaming coffee set on the coffee table when he'd finally shuffled out of his room.

Izuku had been up early enough to make himself and his guardian eggs—nothing extravagant, but he could make decent scrambled eggs, as eggs were one of the things he could sometimes find in the fridge growing up.

He plated it up with toast and set the two plates on the table.

He's not sure why he's so awkward when it comes to inviting his guardian to eat with him.

Once again, he knows the worst that'll happen would be Shota declining the offer.

Like when he'd been offering tea to his guardians, he lingers in the doorway as he tries to find his voice. He hopes at some point they won't make him quite as nervous, but this is all still pretty new, and they're all just starting to understand each other.

He shouldn't have been nervous, Izuku is coming to realize after the second time he'd worried over nothing when it comes to asking his guardians things—Shota pushes himself up with an arched eyebrow when disturbed before his eyebrows knit together at the stumbled over invitation and he finally stands up and grabs his mug off the coffee table.

Izuku will never admit the warm feeling of pride as he sees Aizawa-Sensei, stern and rough around the edges, eating and enjoying something he made. He even gets a gruff compliment as his teacher pauses his eating to sip at his coffee (which is when he points out that Izuku hadn't touched his meal yet, and the boy yelps and shovels a forkful of eggs into his mouth, much to his guardian's amusement).

They arrive at school earlier than the two of the usually would, early enough that Shota leads Izuku into the teacher's lounge until more students arrive. Hizashi is there, already hunched over what looks like their English homework from Friday, which reminds Izuku that, *oh yeah*, he hadn't finished his English homework because he'd been too side tracked with a ghost's birthday and his out of character guardians.

Thankfully, Hizashi is more than happy to help him with those last couple concepts he'd struggled with. The Voice Hero multitasks like an expert as he guides the teen through the concepts as he marks through their work.

Slowly, teachers start filling the room. None seem too surprised to find

Izuku sharing the space of Hizashi's desk, a chair pushed up so they can both work at the small surface area. Nemuri bounds over to ruffle Izuku's hair and drapes over Hizashi's shoulder to watch him mark.

Shota just snorts a huff of laughter as Hizashi whines in annoyance at the surprise of weight suddenly on him; not to mention Nemuri pointing things out on the paper despite how, according to his guardians, she is *awful* at English, second in the awful scale to just Snipe.

A couple teachers look their direction, but by the way no one looks surprised at the interaction, he assumes this is a common occurrence.

Izuku doesn't linger long when it starts getting closer to the time when his peers would be arriving. He doesn't want to be seen leaving the teacher's lounge. He doesn't want his friends to think he's in trouble, or worse, think he's not and that he's just spending time with their teachers like a weirdo, or a suck-up. And he really doesn't want anyone to start thinking he's getting any special treatment, because that's just not true, but he has no idea how he'd explain it if his classmates did see.

It's early enough that he's still one of the first ones in the classroom, followed by a ghost who is animatedly telling Izuku about Hizashi's patrol that morning and the villain the Voice Hero had caught.

Izuku listens halfheartedly as he finishes up the rest of his English homework so it's ready for Hizashi's class.

One by one his peers enter the room, most greeting Izuku with waves and smiles before settling at their own desks until their friends arrive, or crowding around their friend's desks as they come in. Uraraka bounds to Izuku's desk when she comes in, followed by a tense Iida.

Izuku wants to ask Iida about the tension; how his jaw is clenched shut like he's trying to compose himself, but Oboro just sends the teenager a sympathetic look, which reminds the green-haired boy that Iida's brother was in the hospital.

That was why Ingenium hadn't been able to come around to celebrate Oboro's birthday like his guardians had mentioned they did every year.

Izuku wants to express his sympathy too; he wants to be there for Iida, and have his friend know he's there for support if he needs it, but he also doesn't want to call Iida out right now.

He doesn't know who, if anyone, in class knows about Iida Tensei being hospitalized due to the Hero Killer. And he also doesn't know how he'd explain his own knowledge of the situation apart from *'oh, we were celebrating a ghost's, Shirakumo Oboro, if ya know him's, birthday, and my foster parents, y'know, Shota and Hizashi, or, our Senseis, mentioned that your brother was supposed to be there too, but couldn't make it because he's currently in the hospital dealing with substantial, and potentially career ending injuries? I'm sorry to hear your brother almost died at Stain's hands.'*

Yeah, *no*.

He was not going to do that. He'd feign ignorance, and offer his sympathy and support in some other way. Preferably a way that didn't need a direct explanation that Izuku definitely did not want to give.

Izuku doesn't have long to figure out a way to broach the subject of support with Iida, because soon bell is ringing and no more than a second later Shota is rolling the door open and stepping into the room. It feels like when Izuku blinks, everyone is in their rightful seats, staring wide-eyed at their Sensei and awaiting his words as Shota's dark eyes survey over the room.

Shota doesn't beat around the bush, eyes sharpening as he strides to his podium, speaking before he even reaches it and can set his papers down, "we've been talking a bit about the upcoming draft internships. As most of you know, Pros typically draft second or third year students as interns, but after your performances at the festival this year, some Pros and Agencies have taken interest in a few of your potentials."

Shota goes on, talking about the results of the Pro Hero drafting, listing how many offers students got (mostly the ranking students who got dozens, if not hundreds, of offers). It's no surprise to Izuku that Todoroki, Tokoyami and Kacchan received the highest amount of offers, but Oboro still lets out a low whistle as he glares at Kacchan, who in turn, is glaring at Aizawa-Sensei.

Their teacher talks of how everyone has to participate in an internship, whether they were drafted and offered positions, or if they'll be taken on by Agencies that agreed to take on students who didn't get any offers.

"Students who did not receive offers will choose from a list of the aforementioned pros offering internship to anyone without, while

those of you who received offers will choose from among your draft nominations. The internships will last one week and you'll have just two days to choose your desired hero agency, so use your time wisely."

When Shota was done speaking, he gets to work handing out lists of Agencies; some of offers from interested parties, and others just a list of Agencies and Pros willing to take in any students. Some students wind up with one of each—like Izuku.

He has some offers, a couple interested Pros willing to take him and his destructive Quirk on, but there's still not enough variety between Pros and Agencies, so Aizawa-Sensei settles a list of the aforementioned Agencies as well.

Hizashi had put in an offer on him, but that one for some reason feels a bit like a pity offer. Izuku's eyes narrow on the name '*Gran Tornio*', who he's never even heard of before—which is surprising because Izuku knows *a lot* of heroes.

"Who is that?" Oboro is leaning on the back of Izuku's chair, scanning over the names just as the green-haired teen is. Izuku lifts his shoulders in a silent, halfhearted shrug as an answer. "I've never even heard that name before..."

Izuku bites the inside of his cheek as he narrows his eyes at the name before promptly switching to the second paper he'd been given. He surveys over the Pros and Agencies, most familiar to him. He's curious about this Pro who he's never heard of though. Maybe someone else will know?

"Gran Torino?" Hizashi cocks an eyebrow, leaning back against the couch as he runs his fingers through his hair. He'd just gotten out of the shower, washing out all the hair gel that kept his Present Mic hairstyle together, "I've never heard of him."

"I hadn't either," Shota confesses as he joins them in the living room from the kitchen. The scent of freshly brewed coffee fills the room, and Izuku knows the dark-haired man is caffeinating so he's prepared for his patrol that night.

The underground hero walks in, one hand clutching a mug of steaming coffee, and the other holding a curled-up Nemo in the bend of his arm. He plops down gracefully on the other side of the couch from Hizashi, kicking his legs up to drop his fit in Hizashi's lap.

The blonde hardly reacts, just settles his hands on Shota's shins and keeps his eyes on Izuku.

Shota takes a sip of his coffee before his own gaze is settling on the teen, head angling as he continues, "he's retired. Apparently, he taught at Yuuei years and years ago, way before we attended."

"He did?" Izuku cocks his head, tucking his feet under himself. He nurses his bottle of water in his hands, shooting a short look at the ghost perched on the armrest beside him. Oboro is looking between the three of them, acutely following the conversation but making no move to be a part of it.

"This guy must be ancient then," Hizashi blinks, "I've still never heard of him— how long did he teach?"

Shota's lip puckers slightly like he'd eaten a slice of lemon, "one year."

"One year?" Hizashi sputters in surprise, "why only a year? Was it on his terms or, like, was he fired or something?"

Shota shrugs, sipping at his coffee thoughtfully. "Not sure. I tried to dig some information up, but considering the year he taught predates Nezu even *teaching* at the school, there weren't a lot of sources. There isn't even much about him as a Pro—he wasn't a limelight Hero and as far as I know, he also wasn't an underground Hero either. If there weren't copies of his license on file, I wouldn't have even believed he was a Pro Hero at all."

"Why is he interested in me?" Izuku blinks, frowning between his teachers.

"I'm wondering the same thing," Shota huffs out, stroking Nemo's head. "It's just strange that this retired Pro is willing to come out of hiding and offer you an internship. There's been no word from him since his single year teaching at Yuuei. Nothing reported of his Hero name either since his retirement."

"And we're sure we can trust him?" Hizashi's voice is quiet—that thoughtful, deep in thought kind of quiet. "There has to be a reason he only taught for one year. What if he was fired for misconduct or something? You want us to ship our kid off to some strange, retired Pro hero for a week?"

"I looked," Shota shrugs, "nothing of termination. That would've been documented, no matter who this Pro is; he left on his own account

after the year finished. If he had of been fired, he wouldn't have made it onto Izuku's nomination list—who do you take me for, 'zashi?"

"Sorry," the blond shakes his head with a light, apologetic smile.

Shota rolls his eyes at Hizashi's halfhearted apology, digging his heels into the blonde's thighs. Hizashi huffs a light laugh as he gently massages Shota's ankles and shins in prolonged apology.

The blonde's gaze casts over to Izuku in silent question as his fingers move, "what do you think, Izuku?"

"Well... I'm curious," the teen shifts where he's sitting. "There has to be a reason he's interested in me. He didn't draft anyone else in class —we talked about our offers and where we were interested in going over lunch."

"No, he didn't," Shota agrees quietly, having gone through all the paperwork first. "But that said, there's no reason this internship offer isn't viable. There is no reason for me to veto the offer, hence why it made it onto the list, so the choice of whether you want to take it is entirely yours."

"I don't know," Izuku mulls over it, the pad of his thumb swiping over the rim of his water bottle. "It's just weird that I've never heard of him, y'know? I've always loved heroes, and studied them relentlessly growing up. I love seeing new ones, and learning of the old ones and studying their Quirks. It's kinda my hobby... But a hero no one's heard of, me included... I don't know."

Izuku thinks for a second longer, thoughts drifting to All Might.

He knows he should run the internship options past him and see what he thinks. All Might may not be around a lot to really help with the Quirk, but he does know a lot of Pros, and he probably knows good places to intern that could possibly help him when it comes to One for All.

And, who knows? All Might might even know about this Gran Torino guy or something?

"You still have until end of day tomorrow to decide," Shota nods his head, gaze watching the teen.

"Don't rush the decision," Hizashi adds, "but don't let your curiosity hinder your decision. Pick the internship that you think will be best

for you."

"I will."

As it turns out, All Might *does* know of Gran Torino.

"You know how I mentioned having a couple mentors...?" The Hero rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck, sounding the most nervous Izuku thinks he'd ever heard him sound. The Pro looks tense as he leads the teen through the hallway and into the teacher's lounge. Izuku gives a slow nod as he tries to keep up with All Might's quick, almost scared steps. "Well... Gran Tornio was one of them."

"He was?" Izuku squawks, tripping over his own feet as he follows All Might into one of the conference rooms in the teacher's lounge. "He was *your* mentor?"

"One of them," All Might mumbles sheepishly.

"But he was a teacher here..." Izuku mumbles out before he can even think it through. Logically, he knows All Might graduated from Yuuei. That had been what made Yuuei High School such a sought-after school in the recent years—the Number One Hero graduating from there? Every hero wannabe wanted to go to school where the best of the best attended.

Still, Izuku can't help but recoil slightly at the knowledge. He goes to school where not only Present Mic and Eraserhead attended, but All Might too. What is his life?

"Yes," All Might sighs, "he was. After my first mentor, the seventh wielder of One for All, passed on, Gran Torino stepped up in her place as my mentor. He'd aided her a little bit when it came to mentoring me, knew of the Quirk from her, one of the few people to know the full story without possessing the Quirk himself. I really don't know how he managed to do it, but when my third year rolled around, he was my homeroom sensei."

"He became a teacher just to teach you?" Izuku blinks in surprise. That was some dedication. Izuku can only imagine what a Pro would need to do to be able to teach at a school like Yuuei. And to go through the process for one class—one *student*, was incredibly surprising.

"I believe so, young Midoriya," All Might clears his throat like he's

trying to swallow down a lump of nerves. “It was a brutal year between my classes, internships and his intense training...”

“And he wants to train *me*?” Izuku asks in bewilderment. “Why?”

“I assume the same reason he thought to train me,” All Might shakes his head, interlacing his fingers together before settling them in his lap like a scolded schoolboy. “He knows about One for All, and he does know how it’s passed from holder to holder...”

“How does he even know about me?”

At this, All Might shrugs helplessly, “perhaps the Sports Festival? If he watched that then he would’ve seen that you’re not quite... up to his standards. He’s known two generations of One for All holders now, so he’d know the Quirk if he saw it... Which would mean I’m failing you as a mentor—” sheer fear settles on the Pro’s face and clouds his eyes like he’s seconds away from being smote by God himself.

How... how scary is this mentor?

“That means he would’ve seen me getting injured by One for All,” Izuku winces. It really wasn’t his proudest moment—letting Todoroki and his own superpowered Quirk break him to the point that he needed surgery to right the wrong.

“Yes,” All Might winces. “I’d bet that’s why he put in the internship offer.”

Izuku is silent as he lets that sink in. Then, he’s looking up towards his quiet mentor, “should I take it?”

All Might shifts uncertainly, like he’d been expecting the question, had thought about an answer, but still has no idea how to respond despite it. He opens his mouth, only to close it and frown.

Finally, the man lets out a slow sigh, “I’ll admit,” All Might starts off slowly, “it has been quite a few years since I’ve spoken to him... And he has a tendency to be a bit of a... *harsh* teacher, but he was a good mentor. I learned a lot from him in the years I studied under him, and despite never possessing One for All, he’s got a pretty good handle on it from watching Nana and myself.”

Izuku thinks back to how All Might had talked about his mentors back after the USJ incident when he’d had to tell the Pro he’d almost accidentally spilled the secret of One for All to his Sensei.

“Aizawa has been helpful for you, I know that. I’ve seen the subtle changes in how you wield the Quirk, due to his teachings, but Gran Torino has more knowledge on it and I don’t doubt he’ll help you along as he did for me. It won’t be easy, mind you, he has a tendency to be... *brutal*, my boy, but he knows what he’s talking about...”

Izuku sucks in a breath, mouth flattening into a straight line.

That afternoon, Izuku passes Shota the finished internship document. The only thing the slip of paper is missing is a guardian’s signature. Izuku watches as Shota’s eyes scan over the paperwork before catching on the chosen Pro/Agency line. His attention lifts up to Izuku, mouth pressed in a straight line, but a silent question flickering in his gaze.

“You’re sure?” Shota asks quietly under his breath so the rest of the class won’t hear. Izuku gives a serious nod, dropping his gaze to his shoes. Shota lets out a heavy sigh, one eyebrow arching as he scribbles his signature on the bottom and files it away with the rest of his classes, “take your seat.”

They pick hero names that class.

Shota had given them a casual warning the day prior, telling them to think about it without really telling them to think about it. Still, most of his class is shocked when Midnight saunters in, tell them what the agenda is as if Shota hadn’t mentioned it yesterday.

Shota promptly tucks away for a nap, leaving the class in her hands. Izuku can tell Shota isn’t completely asleep, more resting his eyes as he listens in.

He’d picked up on when his guardian is actually asleep and feigning it in the time, he’d been living with them. There are subtle tells.

Izuku’s not quite sure why he settles on the name ‘Deku’.

For years he’d hated the stupid nickname. It made him feel awful, and worthless. *Useless*, as intended when Kacchan had doled it out all those years ago. But it was also a part of him. A bit of a reminder. Why he needed to be better, do better. He never wanted to feel like he had growing up again.

And then there was the fact that the nickname had slowly started to change since starting at Yuuei.

Uraraka started calling him by it; in no way meant to belittle him. And after she had, some of his other classmates had as well, and suddenly it felt different. No one here knew the origin of the nickname.

And even that little bit of confirmation from Kacchan that it was just a stupid nickname like ‘Kacchan’ was to the ashen-haired teenager had taken away some of the heat and hatred when thinking of the nickname.

It’s still not a particularly nice nickname, nor will it ever really be considering what it means, and where it came from, but Izuku does settle on it as his Hero name. He knows that Shota definitely doesn’t agree with his choice, even if Midnight wrinkles her nose but accepts it nonetheless.

Izuku can tell by the way his guardian’s lips twitch downwards through his feigned sleep when Izuku announces his decision, but he doesn’t back down.

Deku it is.

Perched on Izuku’s desk, Oboro huffs out a breath of fond acceptance, also not particularly happy with Izuku naming himself ‘useless’ but the ghost shoots him a small smile even as he rolls his eyes.

Before Izuku knows it, he’s arriving at the address Gran Torino had gave him. All Might hadn’t been kidding when he’d said that this old man could be brutal.

Not even in the way he taught, but in the way he jested as well.

It was a little cruel to play dead like an opossum or something right before his new protégé arrives; laid out on the floor like he’d been murdered. Izuku’s heart lurches into his throat, and he’s sure that his heartrate doesn’t drop that entire first day he’s with his new mentor.

He really does have Izuku fooled when he arrives in for his internship. Izuku should’ve known then that he was in for one hell of an internship just by how he’d met Gran Torino.

The little old man in the yellow Hero costume appears to be senile. The man calls him ‘Toshinori’, All Might’s given name like he’s back mentoring the Number One hero instead of Izuku.

He plays the part perfectly, and Izuku is fooled.

Izuku quickly realizes that's just a façade. Gran Torino is messing with him.

How Gran Torino teaches is kinda brutal as well. He'd psyched himself up for much worse considering how All Might had all but cowered when Izuku had mentioned the retired Pro's name.

It's no walk in the park.

Izuku gets thrown around—tossed into walls and slammed into the floor by a tiny man who's easily in his eighties. The retired Pro is fast—Izuku would love to pick apart the man's Quirk, but for now all he can focus on is not getting his ass handed to him by an elderly man whipping around the room.

He does learn.

It takes just two days of working with his new mentor for Izuku to be able to channel One for All throughout his whole body instead of directing it towards any specific part when he intends to use it. He hears whispers in the back of his mind praising him.

He tries not to get distracted by it, but it's odd. Strange in a way he's never felt before, which says something considering he's seen ghosts for as long as he can remember. He's seen and heard ghosts, but he's never seen or heard them... within himself.

He tries not to let his thoughts catch on the fact that these voices he's faintly hearing in the depth of his brain are probably those of the past One for All wielders.

Neither he nor All Might really knew what was going on with the Quirk, besides the fact that, yes those several figures behind All Might during the Sports Festival were probably the seven previous wielders.

He'd brought up what he'd seen during his battle with Shinsou to the Pro that Monday after the festival, and All Might had gone surprisingly quiet as he'd thought. Though not exactly like Izuku, nowhere near as prominent, the Pro had also had mentioned hearing and seeing similar things when he's possessed the full power of One for All.

All Might does admit that the Quirk is haunted—but of it, he doesn't know much considering it never really showed itself to him, and

neither his mentor Nana, or Gran Torino had ever spoken of it.

It matched up too well for it to be anything else, but still, All Might seems confused that Izuku had physically seen them, when All Might himself had just heard whispers and visualized shapes almost resembling people.

Izuku can't help but wonder if it's because of his other Quirk that they're all so human in appearance. That they had physical forms outside the Quirk—stood behind All Might— and that they talk to him more than they'd talked to anyone else.

He'll dwell on that later, when he's not in near constant threat of being slammed into the floor or the wall.

Izuku trains hard—fights Gran Torino to the best of his abilities and starts to feel almost... confident in his growing abilities. There's still a lot of work to be done—he can hardly even touch the Jet Quirked man, but he's grown a lot just since arriving for his week internship.

He can't wait to show Shota how much he's learned on their next Quirk training session. Or even during class!

During this internship, Izuku also has the added distraction of a ghost who decides, since he can't be of any use around the retired Pro, that he'll add commentary that just Izuku can hear. Izuku gets really tired of hearing *'anddd he's down!'* and *'looks like our favorite green bean has taken yet another hit by the ancient hero!'* and worst of all, *'wooww, that'll definitely leave bruise!'* very fast.

He supposes it's a good lesson when it comes to focus—he needs to focus on Gran Torino's quick movements and not the ghost's irritating voice and words. After a couple hard hits while he's distracted, Izuku starts getting better at tuning his friend out and focusing on the threat.

He knows Oboro is just trying to be annoying, but it actually does help his focus. *And*, he can now easily ignore the ghost. Probably not what Oboro had in mind when it came to annoying Izuku, but Izuku thinks it's a very beneficial lesson.

When things do get intense though; when Izuku gets worked up or things get a bit too rough, the ghost does know when to keep quiet. He asks if Izuku is alright, and lets his tone take a concerned curl. And at night when Gran Torino has passed out, the ghost is very sympathetic and understanding of just how brutal the training is. It's painful, and Izuku just knows he's going to leave this internship

bruised like an old banana.

So Izuku's not really mad about the ghost's presence, just a bit annoyed.

Despite how brutal it is, Izuku knows he's learning.

He can feel himself getting better with the Quirk, which is why he begs for Gran Torino to keep attacking. Pleads for the man to keep going for *just a few more minutes*. Izuku knows he'll land a hit on the Pro at some point—he just needs to keep practicing.

But, like Shota, the man cuts him off when he deems Izuku has had enough for the day. Or, maybe the Pro just really likes his early evening bedtime.

It the evening of his third day of the internship that Gran Torino deems him ready to go on an actual patrol, or, maybe he just wants to switch things up from the cat and mouse game Izuku had been losing horribly at.

The teen is surprisingly nervous as he changes into his hero costume. It's the first time he's sought villains out, instead of coming face-to-face with them during a school activity, or being cornered by them on his walk home from school.

He's nervous on the taxi ride to the train station, but he's anxious by the time they board the train taking them to Shinjuku.

And then... and then shit hits the fan.

The Nomus attack, the train is destroyed and Gran Torino leaps into action—and Izuku can't just sit there and wait. He's a heroics course student. He's here on this internship to learn how to help people. What good is he just sitting on a damaged train waiting for someone else to come rescue them when he can be helping.

He knows he needs to locate Gran Torino— he doesn't doubt the Pro's ability but... Gran Torino is kinda old. And retired. And Izuku knows he should've stuck close to him, Izuku is the man's responsibility after all, even if the Pro demanded he staying the in the train car.

Oboro is at his side as Izuku traverses the city easily, falling back on everything Aizawa-Sensei had been teaching them in class. His recently learned Full Cowl makes it so much easier to do so, and Izuku almost feels like he's flying as he jumps from rooftop to rooftop.

When he arrives at the center of the chaos, he's almost instantly distracted by a call of Iida's name. There are Pros talking about his friend—his missing friend, apparently. It's unlike Iida to go AWOL.

That's when a bad feeling churns his stomach.

He knows Iida has been off since his brother was attacked, but he'd never suspected Iida to be dumb enough to go off alone in search of the Hero Killer. He hoped he was wrong, that his feeling was nothing. But that's not the case.

Izuku's not entirely sure how he finds Iida—in Stain's hands, no less—but he does.

And he knows he can't leave his friend to fend for himself. He's torn between finding his mentor and helping his friend, and obviously helping his friend wins out. It's hardly a thought—he's moving before he even realizes it's even Iida on the ground with the murder taking out Heroes left and right standing over his prone form.

And the fight begins.

It grueling.

Stain is a hard opponent.

He's smart, and has a very useful Quirk. He'd taken out dozens of Heroes—and Izuku knows that they're just students. Iida had walked into this fight with nothing by vengeance on his mind, and that's not what they're supposed to be.

Izuku's not even surprised when he finds himself locked under Stain's Quirk, body paralyzed no matter what he does. He's not surprised, but he's so incredibly frustrated with himself that it's not even funny. He's faintly reminded of his battle against Shinsou, but this is a hundred times worse.

Oboro is loudly panicking at Izuku's side like he doesn't know what to do. Izuku can't open his mouth to speak, he barely has control of his eyes. Izuku's breathing picks up as Stain eyes him. The man is talking, preaching, really, but it's in one ear and out the other as he slinks over to Iida, clearly ready to end what he's started.

Izuku could cry when he spots Todoroki. He hardly remembers shooting off the text to all his contacts. It's had been nothing more than a location drop and sheer hope that his classmates would see

through the rushed and panicked message and come help.

A shot of fire blocks Stain from reaching Iida, followed by ice crystalizing along the ground and sweeping everyone behind Todoroki.

He can just watch as Todoroki fights the villain one-on-one.

Izuku's not sure what forces him out of the paralysis—maybe it's Oboro shaking him by the shoulder and urging him up, or the Quirk wearing off, but as soon as he feels it, he's up and aiding Todoroki.

Oboro is trying his best, using himself as a distraction. He throws himself through the Killer like he had the villains at the USJ, but it doesn't seem to faze the villain at all. Todoroki is using his ice, his more trained side, and Izuku feels the chill of it sinking into his bones as he fights.

The second time Izuku feels the paralysis sink into his bones, Oboro is at his side in a second. The ghost had dropped to his knees beside Izuku, hands hovering uselessly.

"Fuck, are you okay?"

No, he's not.

"D-do it," Izuku forces out, "s-save Native and Iida. Protect them. Help Todoroki."

A look of determination clashes over Oboro's face and he gives a hard nod. His hand reaches out, ready to grasp Izuku's arm—but it goes through.

Oboro lets out a gasp as he wavers forwards, clearly expecting to make contact. Izuku opens his mouth the share the surprise, except a feeling of *cold* rushes through his body. He wants to cry out, but no words will come.

He's so cold it's almost painful.

Todoroki's attacks vary between fire and ice, throwing each element easily and blocking Stain away from Iida and Native, but Izuku can see him getting tired. He sees him getting overwhelmed, Todoroki is still unused to using his fire, but he does without a second thought.

The fire spreads warmth through the alley, but the ice rushes Izuku's

veins. He can't move and the ground is so cold. He's so cold. He's never felt like this before—it feels like his blood is second away from freezing.

It *hurts*.

The only saving grace is those bursts of warmth, without them, it feels like Izuku would've frozen to death. His body eases out of the paralysis slowly, and his body's first response is to get up despite how his body wobbles and his limbs feel uncoordinated.

Oboro is at his side as he pushes himself up, hand phasing through him again as if the first failed attempt at using Izuku's Quirk was a fluke. The chill that crawls up his shoulder where the ghost had attempted to touch him make a cry of pain burst from his mouth.

It's never happened before. Oboro is always cold, but it feels like the ghost is jabbing an icicle through his shoulder. He hears himself mumbling out apologies and slurred reassurances, but it doesn't look like it helps.

He's never seen Oboro jump away from him so fast.

"I'm sorry," the ghost wheezes out, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I don't know what's happening! I don't know how to help! I'm so sorry!"

Izuku can't focus on the ghost.

Not with his classmates struggling to survive, and a wounded Pro Hero relying on them. When Izuku finally managed to focus his attention on his friends, Iida has joined the fight again. It seems Todoroki had gotten through to him.

His attacks are slower, even with full cowl. The chill in his body makes his limbs heavy and tense. He's never felt like this before. Never been so cold, but he can't give up. He can't, and he won't. He'll keep going until he literally can't anymore.

It takes the three of them together to finally defeat Stain.

Izuku is still so, so cold as they restrain the Hero Killer. He feels his body shiver, slipping a little on the frosted ground. It's not even really cold outside—it's a nice night. But his body doesn't seem to agree. His teeth chatter the faintest bit, and the shivers are slowly getting worse.

He can't help but push up against Todoroki's fire side as they all work together to get both Stain and Native out of the alley and onto the street so they're spotted when help finally arrives.

"I'd like to apologize," Iida bows his head, before looking up between his friends. He says more, talks for a while, but Izuku can't seem to force himself to focus on it. He thinks Iida might be crying through the apology. He says something about selfishness, but the word is gone from Izuku's brain as fast as he hears it.

His brain feels funny. His everything feels funny, actually.

He's so cold still, wavering against his classmate's side.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki turns his head lightly, eyebrows furrowing when he spots the other teen shivering. "You're freezing..."

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, tongue feeling heavy in his mouth.

His energy is very quickly abandoning him. It feels like his energy is being drained out and replaced with snapping cold that tears at his body. He can't find it in himself to reply. Can hardly make his mouth even open as he slurs out a few syllables.

"Midoriya?" Iida questions, one hand putting pressure on his own shoulder wound, while the other keeps a hold of Stain. "Are you alright?"

"He's so cold," Todoroki frowns, lifting his arm to wrap around Izuku's shoulder and actually tug him into his side. Izuku feels the warmth spread along his side, but he can't seem to stop the shivers. "Your heartrate is very slow."

Izuku hadn't even noticed Todoroki's fingers pressed against the pulse point in his neck.

"You're not looking too good," Oboro whispers from the other side of the sidewalk. He'd made sure to keep his distance since the second failed attempt at channeling Izuku's Quirk. A small part of Izuku feels bad the ghost is so afraid to get close, but the bigger part is melting into the warmth of his classmate.

"I didn't hit you with my ice, did I?" Todoroki sounds off. Izuku hears the consternation in his classmate's voice at just the thought of accidentally injuring someone with his Quirk.

“N-no,” Izuku manages to spit out, the words coming out slurred, “c-co-cold.”

“It’s not cold, Midoriya,” Iida sounds so concerned. “This is not normal.”

“No,” Todoroki agrees quietly, “it’s not.”

“He needs help.” Izuku feels Todoroki nod slowly in agreement.

“I’m so sorry,” Oboro whispers dejectedly. Izuku wants to tell him it’s not his fault, because it’s not. Oboro touches him all the time, and he’s never felt like this. He doesn’t know what’s happening. “I don’t know what happened... what’s different this time? Why did I do *that* to you?”

The Pros arrive in a flurry of questions and concern.

Gran Torino gives Izuku a look before moving to his side and eyeing him. He must not look great, because his mentor frowns heavily. He touches Izuku’s arm, the frown deepening when he does, “what happened to him?”

Izuku is having a hard time keeping himself up, and if it wasn’t for Todoroki, he’d have probably sprawled across the pavement by now. He can’t seem to regulate his temperature, even with Todoroki’s help.

“We’re not sure,” Todoroki responds steadily, “I might have accidentally hit him with my Quirk...”

“N-no,” Izuku denies instantly, “d-di-didnn't.”

“Ambulances are on the way,” one of the Pros tells them calmly.

Izuku has half a mind to pull away from Todoroki in order to look at the gathering of Pro heroes. He doesn’t even realize he actually is pulling away until he almost hits the ground— except before he does, something grabs him.

He cries out as something sharp pierces through the cold haze. Pierces into his body. It stings, grasping at him and he feel wind in his face. Cold, *cold* wind. He hears voices behind him. Calls of his name. Oboro shouts, and Gran Torino yells. Todoroki and Iida call his name in panic, but all he can focus on is the fact that something has him.

And then he’s falling.

Izuku doesn't remember crashing to the ground. But he sees Stain, and he sees the Nomu who'd taken him. His head feels full of cotton, and he's trying to grasp at consciousness, but it feels like a losing battle.

The last thing he remembers seeing is Oboro instantly at his side, hands hovering over Izuku, almost afraid to touch him, and his friends rushing towards him followed only a couple steps behind by the Pros.

Shota is on patrol when he gets the message.

It's a bit of a slow night.

He feels the most awake he has since he'd gotten the roster of his hell class. He'd been getting some sleep during the days, prepared for his nightly patrol. All the teachers had been taking the lack of class 1-A and 1-B in stride and using the free hours during the day for themselves, either as 'me time' or to prep for the Heroics students returns.

Shota himself had used his free time to sleep.

And it had been the best naps he'd ever taken at Yuuei. It's very nice to not have to be worried about his class lighting things on fire, or starting fights, or attracting villains like villain magnets they are.

He hasn't heard anything from any of the Agencies or Pro Heroes who's taken his kids on, which is beyond great. That means nothing too dangerous has happened, no one's been hospitalized and he can rest easy.

But of course, when does that ever happen when it comes to his class?

He's perched on the top of a building when his phone vibrates in his pocket. Since it's slow, he slips it out of his pocket. It's an emergency alert of a villain attack in Hosu—specifically a Nomu attack.

It's come down through the police, asking any and all available Pros to make their way to downtown Hosu. It's not unheard of for neighboring forces and Pros to be asked to aid with rounding up villains, doing damage control and helping civilians.

Plus, Shota knows that Nomus are no joke. Just the thought of those monstrous creatures makes the scar on his cheek tingle. He reaches a hand up to brush along the mark, frowning when it doesn't stop the feeling.

Hosu is only a train ride away, and he knows he could get there fairly quickly. His patrol is pretty slow anyways, he'd be more use over there than he would here. He'll leave his patrol in the capable hands of the police.

Shota hops across a couple buildings on his way to the train station.

He knows the city will be in chaos with the attacks, and as much as he knows that the Heroes who patrol Hosu are capable, he still wants to lend a hand. Plus, he knows for a fact that Iida is interning there, and he wants to make sure his student is alright.

Thank God it's just one of his Problem Children in the center of the chaos over there.

Shota hops across a couple more buildings before he feels his phone vibrate again. For just a second, he ignores it, figuring that it's just updates from the automated police line connected to his phone. The same line that had informed him of the attack.

But then it vibrates a second time. And a third. A fourth, fifth, sixth and—Shota roughly drags his phone out of his pocket at the seventh vibration only to freeze.

The messages are from Hizashi.

Hizashi 11:48 PM

Anser ur phnoe

SHota

Please.

Hizashi 11:49 PM

Pls tell me you saw the text

Shota, please

Fcuk, im caling

The messages came in rapid succession, none giving him even a second to respond even if he had pulled his phone out instantly. He stares down at the messages in surprise, heart thrumming in his chest as he thinks about what could've riled his husband up enough that he loses his ability to spell.

He’s not thinking long because at the bottom of his notifications, the first message to come in, that apparently was *not* from Hizashi like the rest, is a singular message from Izuku.

And no, it’s not even a message—it's a pinned location. A pinned location in *Hosu*.

His foster child is in Hosu, where there’s an infestation of Nomu, where the League of Villains is probably running rampant. There’s now two of his kids in danger, and he’s a whole city away. What the fuck.

Shota hurries his pace, bounding to the next rooftop as his phone vibrates with an incoming call. He doesn’t even need to look at the caller ID before he’s pressing his phone to his ear, only to hear his husband in hysterics.

He tries to calm Hizashi down, but that’s a bit hard to do when he can hardly hear him over the sound of his own pounding heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo? Whaddya think?

I'm looking forward to the next chapter already. Some questions will be answered regarding this chapter, and there will of course be some nice fluffy stuff because it's only fair after this chapter! Look forwards to some hospital fluff, worried dads and Todoroki and Iida being there as well (and we can all imagine how that'll end up).

As always, thanks so much for taking the time to read! Comments and kudos are always very appreciated, I love to read what you guys have to say!

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello, hello!

We are back for another chapter! Hospital stuff as promised, but with more fun stuff sprinkled in! Hope you guys like this as much as I do, because this chapter was a blast to write!

Onwards with the chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota's not sure he's ever moved as fast as he is now.

His heart thrums in his chest, and his legs and arms pulse achingly in overexertion. He's been running for a while now; traversing over the rooftops in a flurry of pounding footsteps, and sharp, purposeful whips of his capture weapon.

He has one goal in mind, and that goal is getting to where his Problem Child— the kid who'd weaseled his way into Shota's life, the child he'd taken on as a foster—had pinned his location with nothing of an explanation.

It's a cry for help. A panicked plea. Desperation.

He wonders who else got the hurried message, so hurried in fact, that Izuku hadn't bothered (or had *time*, that thought in which makes Shota's heart freeze up) to add any additional information. He knows himself and Hizashi had gotten the message, but was there anyone else?

And it makes Shota's heart seize in his chest because he's not there. He's not there to help.

The man forces out a ragged breath, lungs burning in his chest.

His lungs feel dry, as does his throat, but he's not sure if it's the fear, or the fact he's pushing himself harder and past his usual breaking point. Patrol, as strange as it is to say, isn't typically as grueling as this.

His routes are routine and his body almost moves on autopilot down

the handful of patrol districts that he gets placed on throughout the week. He has four distinct routes, and there is no pattern to where he goes and when. Patterns are bad, especially when you don't know who's watching and learning.

This is overtaxing in a way he hadn't felt in years, but he keeps going.

Two of his kids are in the heart of the danger zone. Two. Iida he can see— Manual patrols Hosu, and he obviously would've gone to help out when the chaos struck, Tenya in tow, but Izuku? Izuku isn't even supposed to be in Hosu—and he's certainly not supposed to be in what looks like a hidden alley only seen in the finest print of the map pin.

Honestly, if there wasn't a literal pin in the street name, Shota isn't sure he'd even be able to locate it. The street is small and mazed off by other small streets. A decent way away from the main street.

What the hell is his kid doing there?

His thoughts are tripping over his Problem Child on repeat; the fact that he was in a city where he wasn't supposed to be, and that he had sent a terrifying message then answered none of the questioning texts or dozen calls Hizashi attempted.

He can focus on the nitty gritty details later, at this point he just needs to *get there*.

The trains had been down. A train car heading to Shinjuku had been attacked by the Nomus as it was passing through Hosu. The train car had been totaled, and the last he'd heard, they'd still been working to evacuate the civilians trapped aboard, as well as getting the Pro who'd been attacked medical attention.

That had been a wrench in Shota's plan of making it to his kids (*students*, he means) as fast as he could. The train from Musutafu to Hosu is roughly twenty-five minutes depending on if there's any delays or problems.

It's the fastest way to travel from city to city considering there wasn't any traffic like when driving and it was much faster than walking, or even running.

But with the busted train car in Hosu blocking the rails, and the attack currently going on, nothing was moving.

Shota had almost punched a wall when he was stopped and informed

of the station closure by station staff not allowing anyone in. Honestly, he probably should've suspected it would be down—public transportation stops when there's a threat nearby, and even if he hadn't been aware of the train car attack, he was aware of the Nomus and the League of Villains running amok in Hosu.

Of course, they'd shut down transportation to the city under attack. The city wouldn't risk potential casualties and additional damage.

So, with that, Shota had done the next best thing; he'd shot the station worker a vicious snarl before clambering up the wall of the station. His best bet at this point was getting himself there on his own two feet, and he was much faster up high than he was down on the ground, and with his capture weapon there to swing and catch himself with, it was just that much faster.

Traffic would be clogged, he knew. Even if he were to take the car—the roads wouldn't be any clearer than the train tracks probably were when it came to panicked civilians rushing out of the area under attack. The roads would be a mess with the evacuations.

So, this was his best option—pushing himself to his full ability and pushing past the strain he's feeling.

He made good time considering. He'd subconsciously given himself a limit of one hour to make it to his problem child. It was a logical aim—doubling the time it takes to arrive on the train and adding an addition ten minutes of leeway.

He made it to the outskirts of Hosu in just under thirty-five minutes, and was fast approaching Izuku's pinned location when he'd hit the forty-five-minute mark.

He stumbled to an ungraceful stop at the edge of the building that peered down at the location pin, heart dropping to his stomach when he realizes that, *no*, Izuku wasn't here anymore. The alley is empty, hardly even looking like a fight had taken place below.

What could've happened in the hour since Shota had received that text? A lot. That was the answer. Anything can happen in a matter of *seconds*, especially in such a dangerous job. An hour was vast—literally *anything* could've happened since Izuku pressed that send button.

And now he's gone.

He takes just a second to draw in a shaky breath. His lungs ache, and his limbs are on the cusp of going numb. The oxygen is welcome, but it grates at his raw, dry throat and heaving lungs. He sucks in a second breath, and that's when he hears it.

Iida's voice.

He's moving before he even realizes that he's moving. Iida was close—maybe Iida had come to Izuku's aid? Will he find his number one Problem Child in the hands of his respected Class Rep?

He fucking hopes so.

His body is hit unexpectedly with a burst of adrenaline now that he's suddenly so close to his kid—or, he hopes he's close to Izuku, at least. In the least, he's close to Tenya. He can check in with him, and maybe get a bit of peace of mind. The encroaching numbness is wiped away for the time being, and his lungs, though rough and feeling as if they're on fire, don't *ache*.

The edge of the building just before the main road is in sight and he's so, so close.

The voices are louder now—more of them.

Iida and Todoroki—*Todoroki?* What the hell is Todoroki doing here too? There are *three* of his kids here? Three of them, when the only one who's technically supposed to be in Hosu is Iida. He should've expected Endeavor to come aid with the mayhem.

It's good publicity, sure, but seriously, what kind of moron takes a fifteen-year-old into the eye of a villain storm? Sure, he's on internship, but Todoroki has only been a Yuuei student for a couple months, not to mention the fact he *doesn't* have a Provisional License yet. It's still illegal for the students to use their Quirks.

This is nothing more than a learning internship at this point—working with small, petty criminals one tends to encounter on patrol—not diving head first into a full-on battle. It's to see what the world of Heroes and Villains well and truly is, so these kids aren't hanging onto false hope, it's not to toss them into something they're not ready for, even if they think they are. They *aren't*.

Fuck—he really should've seen this coming. His class of hellions. At this point, he should just expect for the other seventeen students to appear before the nights over too.

Shota rushes the edge of the building only to stiffen. There's shouting —desperate shouting. He wants to look down and see what the yelling is about, but his eyes are locked on something else.

A Nomu. A flying one. A flying Nomu *clutching* someone in its talons.

Shota sees a head of fluffy, forest green hair, and that oh so familiar Hero costume. He sees red—blood collecting on the teen, soaking into his costume in dark patches. His teen. His *kid*. That thing has his kid.

There's yelling and shouting, but it falls on muted ears.

Shota can just hear his own heart pumping in his ears, eyes staring in what feels like slow motion as that thing carries his kid away. He has to physically pull himself out of his fearful daze, clutching desperately at his capture weapon and rearing back to rope the bastard holding his kid, but before he can, something else, someone else, is launching onto the Nomu and then Izuku, whoever that is, and the Nomu are all tumbling to the ground.

He's broken out of the trance like state he'd been in at seeing the boy he'd taken in and somehow gotten attached to hit the ground. They weren't high up, but it was still a drop.

Shota leaps down from the top of the building with little regard for his own safety. He barely managed to catch his capture weapon on a lamp post to ease the impact of hitting the ground, but he's to focused on Izuku.

No one moves. Izuku is on the ground behind the... who even is that? No Hero Shota had seen before. Not even underground one, as far as he knows. Todoroki and Iida are crowded in with a few Pros who Shota does know vaguely, but no one makes any move to get to his kid—not even his other students.

For a second, anger thrums in his veins before he sees the fear twisted into his kid's expressions.

They're intently watching that one Pro—the one who'd taken out the Nomu. He hardly hears the chatter coming from the Pros. They're surprised that the stranger had saved Izuku. Surprise is not good coming from Pros—they obviously know something Shota doesn't. The thought prickles his skin.

He sees Endeavor's flames out of the corner of his eye, where he's remaining still like the others—afraid to provoke whatever is

happening here. Izuku is alright for the most part. The Nomu is dead and that man, the Pro(?), had saved him, not harmed him...

Breathy conversation filters around him, but he's too intently focused on his students to really hear. He doesn't think any of them have noticed him, not with... whatever was happening here. Some threat that Shota doesn't quite understand until—

Two words.

Shota's overactive brain manages to catch on to just two of Endeavor's words. Just two.

"...Hero Killer..."

And... that is *not* a Pro. That is not a Pro standing in front of his kid; keeping his kid from aid, from help. Izuku hasn't gotten up. He's probably bleeding, Shota *knows* he's bleeding, and he could be concussed, or injured more than the eye can see, but it's worrying that he's making zero effort to force himself up.

That's the fucking Hero Killer. The murderer who'd taken out dozens of skilled Pro Heroes. Who'd single-handedly ended Tensei's career as a Pro, leaving him within an inch of his life.

And now the bastard had Izuku.

Of course, it would be his group of dumbass students to find the Hero Killer: Stain. Damnit. Was the attack on Hosu not enough? They needed to attract the attention of the current most wanted serial killer, like the danger magnets they are, too?

The Hero Killer, despite being on the news near constantly, had never really been given a clear appearance besides police sketches that varied with each new victim's description of him—but when it comes to sketch descriptions from traumatized victims or civilians who encounter him, it's not always accurate. Details get lost in time, and very few actually get a good look at their assailant.

The more Shota looks now, though, the more he realizes that this man does vaguely resemble the sketches he'd seen in the station and broadcasted over news outlets.

Fuck.

He needs to get Izuku away from him. Sure, he'd saved Izuku from the

Nomu just now, but who's to say Stain doesn't turn and take Izuku out the same way he'd taken out the Nomu? Izuku is a Heroics student after all—he's learning to be a *Hero*.

A lot happens in a matter of a couple seconds. Just Endeavor's appearance enrages the Hero Killer. Stain is on his feet, Izuku thankfully forgotten, as is the gathering of Pros circling his other two students. The killer's attention is on Endeavor solely.

Shota doesn't know what makes Stain stop. The killer's body freezing and cutting off his words; the bitter preaching and slander of the Hero world. His jaw goes slack, and his eyes glaze over.

Shota doesn't have a second to be worried about him though, because Todoroki and Iida are rushing to Izuku, and the Pros are split—half circling the Hero Killer cautiously while the other take off after his students. Endeavor is making his way to the Hero Killer too, seemingly ignoring the fact his child was clearly panicked in his own way.

God, Shota hates limelight heroes. All that mattered to them was being the one to make the arrest, and looking good doing it.

Shota follows suit towards Izuku, momentarily reveling in the guilt and fear clouding in Tenya's eyes. Good. The brat should be afraid. Tenya had spotted him first when he'd pushed his way through the group of Pro making no move to really help.

It's only Iida and Todoroki who fall to their knees beside Izuku's prone form. Iida hovers his hands a bit uselessly, while Todoroki presses his hand, his left, the warm one, to Izuku's neck before pulling the green-haired teen into his side taking great care to keep his right side away from him. What?

"Sensei?" Todoroki is the one to speak, one eyebrow arching faintly in surprise when he finally catches sight of his teacher, "what are you doing here?"

"Eraserhead," Shota corrects gruffly as he pushes through the Pros standing idly. Irritation settles in Shota's blood at the ogling; how they're just standing around while Izuku is tended to by *kids*. He drops to his knees beside Iida, surveying over Izuku's limp body tucked into Todoroki's side. "What does it look like I'm doing? Now, what the hell happened here?"

"We fought the Hero Killer," Todoroki supplies easily, tone indifferent

like he hadn't just taken on a serial killer with two classmates and then watched his classmate be lifted away by one of the same creatures to attack the USJ and put Shota out of commission for a bit.

Iida looks away guiltily, not speaking, and Shota knows that this wasn't just a 'the three of us accidentally met up and also accidentally stumbled upon Stain and decided to fight him' kinda thing.

They'll touch up on that later when he's not staring down at an unconscious Izuku and crowded by his injured students—he's got questions like: How *did* his students stumble upon the current most wanted serial killer? How did his students make it out of that fight with their lives? Why the hell are Izuku and Todoroki even here right now? Why weren't any of them with their internship mentors?

But those can all wait until his head has cleared a little and his students are treated.

They will have words though.

"You shouldn't move him," Shota shakes his head, glaring lightly at where Todoroki is curled around Izuku. Izuku shouldn't have been touched until the paramedics arrived— they clearly need to spend more time on rescue techniques. If the person in question is out of immediate danger, it's best leave them as is until medical personnel can assess the damage before potentially worsening it by carelessly moving them around. Especially when they're unconscious.

"He's freezing," the dual-haired teen mutters, remaining completely still as to not jostle Izuku. "My fire side helps."

Shota blinks in surprise, frown settling on his lips as he leans forwards to touch at Izuku's exposed hand. Todoroki is right. Izuku's skin is cold to the touch. He's not conscious, worryingly, but Shota can hear the whir of sirens approaching. Hopefully they'll arrive soon and he'll be able to get his kids help. None look particularly good—they're all in need of medical attention.

It's not really cold out. No more than it usually is this time of year, but still, Izuku is ice cold. He remembers Chiyo warning them of Izuku's below average temperature, but this was much worse than the cautious warning implied.

Izuku was at risk of hypothermia at this point. Hypothermia that had virtually no cause. Why was his body so cold?

“Alright,” Shota gives a little nod. He can’t say he’s thrilled to relinquish control over Izuku’s wellbeing to a student, but if his kid really is in the early stages of hypothermia, keeping him close to Todoroki’s fire side is the most logical option. “Keep him warm then. EMT’s are on route, I passed them on my way. If he has hypothermia, he has a risk of his body shutting down. Monitor him, and if his temperature drops anymore or you have concerns, tell me immediately. We don’t know the extent of his injuries, so try not to jostle him. Try not to let his temperature drop much more—but don’t over heat him either. I trust you can regulate your temperature, *especially* your fire side, after the festival?”

“Okay,” Todoroki gives a light nod. “And I can, Eraserhead.”

“Good.” Shota lets out a soft breath despite the gravelly reply.

His attention jumps from Izuku and Todoroki, and onto Tenya. He has a lot of questions for the teen—like why in the *hell* he thought it was a good idea to try and take on the serial killer who paralyzed his older brother— but that’s a question for behind closed doors. And preferably when the scarier of the two of them, Hizashi, is there to talk some sense into their pseudo-nephew.

Instead, he takes another calming breath and turns towards the sound of the sirens gradually gaining volume.

Pros block his view.

Annoyance settles in his stomach.

“Don’t just stand there and ogle,” he snaps at the cluster of Pros watching them. “Flag down the ambulances. Restrain that Nomu. Assist with Stain.” He barks the orders out, and even though none of these Pros know him—he could be a random civilian for all they know—they jump into action at the harshness of his tone and the suggestion of actions that they *shouldn’t* need to hear.

He doesn’t know if the Nomu, or Stain are really dead, or just heavily injured, but these Pros just watching his students is pissing him off. And besides, either way, Nomus shouldn’t be underestimated, they’re known to regenerate, and that man, injured or not, is a notorious serial killer also not to be underestimated.

The Pros scatter like bugs, leaving just Shota, his students, and a small elderly man with a yellow hero costume. The costume is familiar, but the face isn’t. It takes probably a second to long for his scattered

thoughts to settle on the fact that this was Gran Torino—just a lot older than his license ID photo from years and years ago.

“Gran Torino,” Shota greets dully, shooting one last look to his students trying to keep themselves calm despite Midoriya’s condition, before he pushes himself up and steps to the short man. He hopes there’s enough distance that none of the students will hear, but he’s not about to walk off to chat and leave them in their states.

“You must be the boy’s homeroom teacher then,” the short man eyes him up and down. “Eraserhead, right? We spoke briefly through email; a little unusual.”

“I got in contact with all the sketchy Pro Heroes offering my students internships,” Shota drawls, knowing he should probably be watching his mouth, but at the same time, his students are hurt. There’s a serial killer on the ground. There’s a *Nomu* on the ground. He’s tired. He’s exhausted—and he’s on his last nerve. His filter is *gone*. “Teaching one single year at Yuuei and then disappearing off the face of the earth after retirement, only to return and offer a fifteen-year-old an internship randomly? A bit strange, wouldn’t you agree?”

Gran Torino’s observing expression doesn’t flicker at all despite Shota’s words.

Gran Torino’s eyes narrow and he leans a bit on his cane, “did the boy get many other offers after his performance in the Sports Festival? A powerful Quirk, but poor control. One could argue he put minimum effort into harnessing his ability. He damaged his body to the point he needed a medical bot escort to the infirmary; seems like he’d be a liability in the field.”

The retired Pro gestures to the students, and Shota has to bite his tongue before he says something he regrets. He doesn’t like the implication that Izuku’s Quirk was the cause of this. He doesn’t know what happened— why he’s in as poor condition as he is— but if it was his Quirk, *Superpower*, he’d have broken limbs, not hypothermia.

Shota simply glares instead of replying.

He knows if he opens his mouth now, he won’t be able to stop. Hizashi has said he doesn’t have a very nice mouth when he’s furious, and he can feel his irritation ticking up. He’s not sure if his anger is from a teacher standpoint, or a guardian standpoint, but he knows either way he’s pissed.

The elderly man sighs, shifts where he's standing and adjusts his hands on the cane, "you're right to be suspicious. I've had no interest in taking on an intern in many years, but I knew I could teach the boy some important stuff throughout this internship."

Shota raises an eyebrow, a silent inquiry about what he happened to be teaching his student.

Gran Torino eyes him thoughtfully. Shota's not sure what the small man finds, but his shoulders relax slightly and rubs as his chin as he continues, "anyone could see the boy has potential to be a great hero, but no one is willing to take the risk of his Quirk. I am. I've worked with people who've had similar Quirks. I've taught children just like him."

Shota is quiet, listening to the man intently.

"That Quirk of his is powerful, and it will continue to cause him harm until he figures out how to use it properly."

"And you're familiar with his Quirk?" Shota narrows his eyes, shoulders slouching as he crosses his arms across his chest. "Specifically his Quirk? Why? How?"

"Looking at Midoriya is like looking at my student from years ago." Gran Torino shrugs, "the similarities are uncanny; from their drives, to their attitudes, to their Quirks. If I taught one, I can teach another. I don't want to see another powerful Quirk ruin a young man's life."

The retired pro huffs out a low breath, scratching at his chin before dropping his hand back onto his cane, "Quirks like... *that*... have the potential to be something great, or they have the potential to tear you to shreds. Midoriya already has permanent damage to his arm, hopefully with what he learned with me, his handle on the Quirk has gotten better."

"And you're that confident?" Shota cocks an eyebrow.

"I told you, I've dealt with a Quirk almost *exactly* the same."

Shota has more questions but he doesn't get the chance to ask— the ambulances are pulling up, and the sirens are blaring loud enough to give him a headache, and he needs to be with his kids.

"I trust you'll take care of my intern?" the small man arches an eyebrow, and Shota wants to growl. "I have business to attend to, but

I'll check in with him in the hospital."

Shota decides not to reply, and instead turns to where three ambulances had arrived. The first is seeing to Stain, who is apparently still alive. The second is trying to pry Izuku away from Todoroki.

The underground Hero takes quick steps in their direction.

Shota manages to convince the EMT pair working on Izuku to let Todoroki ride along. The stretcher is big enough for the two of them to sit comfortably together, especially with Izuku pressed close against Todoroki's fire side for warmth. They're all going to the same place anyways, and with the commotion still dying out downtown, ambulances will be hard to get at this point.

The EMTs hardly put up a fight after they realize Todoroki is doing a better job keeping Izuku warm than any of their equipment can. Shota isn't sure he likes the worry etched on their faces when they take Izuku's temperature, but he's sure he'll get a full report soon from a doctor at the hospital.

He watches as they help Todoroki onto the stretcher, who in turn helps Izuku on. Shota turns away from them to catch Tenya's gaze. He raises an eyebrow in question when he notices the teenager watching him uncertainly. Guilt with an edge of fear flickers through the boy's eyes, hardly hidden behind his glasses.

He's known Tenya since the boy was one, maybe two—he's not entirely sure at which point their friendship with Tensei blossomed enough to go to his house after school, where they'd met baby Tenya and the rest of the Iida family.

"You should go with Midoriya and Todoroki, Sen—Eraserhead," Tenya clears his throat, "I see Manual making his way through the crowd now, so I won't be alone. And I'm sure he'll have quite a lot to say about this..."

True to his words, Manual calls out Iida's name, waving to attract his attention. It's logical, but Shota thinks the kid just doesn't want to be alone with him, and it's probably a good call.

"And he's not the only one with quite a lot to say," Shota scoffs easily, glaring over his nose at the teen who shrinks into himself a little at Shota's hard tone. He pauses, glancing back at where the ambulance holding Izuku and Todoroki is getting ready to take off before looking back at Tenya, "you're sure you'll be alright?"

Despite his annoyance at the world in general, and his nagging worry, Shota makes sure to soften his voice when he regards Tenya, studying the teen's face for any micro expressions that may contradict his words. He doesn't spot anything but honestly.

"Of course!" Tenya puffs out his chest, "you should be focused on Midoriya's wellbeing, I'm worried about his temperature drop considering its Spring, almost Summer now. Midoriya should be your top priority since he's the one in the most worrying state."

"You're all my priority," Shota huffs, letting his tense shoulders relax just the slightest amount. "If you're sure though— stick with Manual until I find you in the hospital, got it?"

"Of course," Tenya bows his head, hand reaching up to clutch at his shoulder as an EMT finally rushes towards him when they spot the blood. "Please take care of my friends, Eraserhead. They're only in those states because of me."

"I will, Kid," Shota says, ignoring the second half of the teen's words for the time being. He pats at Iida's uninjured shoulder, giving a light squeeze before he's ushering the teen towards the waiting EMT. He waves to Manual before falling back to where Todoroki and Izuku are now fully loaded, climbing into the ambulance and silently daring the medic to tell him he can't ride with them.

The medic says nothing, *does* nothing, past the hesitantly cocked eyebrow, and Shota almost commends him for valuing his life and not trying to poke an anxious, angry and severely overtired bear. Some people in this world still have common sense at least.

The doors slam shut with everyone tucked inside, and Shota can't help but slump back against the wall of the truck as he watches the single medic treat Izuku to the best of his ability, working around Todoroki who blatantly refuses treatment until Izuku is cared for, and pretending to not see Shota's intimidating glare as the Pro watches with a hawk's eye.

Class 1-A this year is going to be the death of him.

He can see it now.

As expected, when they arrive at the hospital, his students are taken away by clusters of nurses and doctors. The hospital is very busy—the attack has left dozens of civilians and heroes alike injured and in need

of medical attention.

The Emergency room is packed in, varying degrees of injuries, but none life-threatening.

A small part of Shota is immensely glad that his students arrived via ambulance, which meant that they were top priority to be treated.

That meant they didn't have to deal with the overpacked Emergency room—not that Izuku wouldn't have skyrocketed to the top of the waiting list with his dropped temperature and unconscious state. And even if they had of been added to a waiting list, Shota would've rained down hell until his kids got the attention they needed.

They may have been acting against orders, acting on their own (he doesn't want to say stupid, but *stupid*) accounts, but they'd done what the police and countless Pros couldn't, and that was catching the Hero Killer.

Maybe at some point down the line he'll be proud of what they'd done, and possibly even praise them, but right now... right now is *not* that point. He's not sure it'll be that point for quite a while, but maybe it'll happen sometime.

Maybe.

After Todoroki and Izuku are wheeled out of sight leaving Shota stood in the ambulance arrival terminal alone, the underground Hero refused to move until that second ambulance with Tenya and Manual arrived. Stain would be taken to a guarded hospital suited to handle villains, so he didn't have to worry about the killer being in the same building as his students.

It didn't take long for Tenya's ambulance to arrive, and he was quickly wheeled off in the same direction they'd taken Todoroki and Izuku. Tenya had barely been able to sit up and look at his teacher before he was gone from sight.

Manual hesitated by Shota's side when it was just the two of them. Shota doesn't really look over, already tired of interaction. Something about Gran Torino had rubbed him the wrong way, and he's not sure why. He has nothing against Manual, he's just reached his people quota for a whole month and knows despite that, he'll need to keep pushing.

Shota only looks over when Manual shifts, much like his students do

when they're nervous.

"I should go give my statement," the Pro frowned, staring at the doors where the Engine Quirked teen had just disappeared through, "will you stay with him? He told me you're his homeroom Sensei, and I know he trusts you. He talks highly of you, Eraserhead."

"Yeah," Shota gives a disinterested sniff.

No one needs to know he has any connection to these kids past teacher and student. They don't need to know he's known Tenya since he was in diapers, or that Midoriya is currently his ward. Information like that getting out is dangerous, so it's best to keep up a front.

Though the single word comes out stiff, it's nothing but honesty.

Deep down he knows he'd never leave his students in their current states—currently, he's as close to a guardian as they have— and with the Yuuei contracts all the parents and guardians signed at the beginning of the year, he has the faintest bit of legal say over them should it come to life-or-death situations and their guardians aren't around or can't be reached.

The truth was, that if he did leave for whatever reason, it would be against his will and he would've had to been dragged away kicking and screaming. He wouldn't willing leave his brats—students—alone in a hospital without someone they *know* unless he had to.

Even if they are training to be Heroes, they're still allowed to be scared; they are still *children*.

He doesn't mention that to Manual though.

"It shouldn't take long," Manual rubs nervously at the back of his neck. Shota eyes him with a blank expression that is nothing but exhaustion, but probably comes off as unfriendly to an untrained eye. "I'd just like to check up on him when he's settled in a room. We talked a little on the way over, but I still have questions. I didn't want to say too much with civilians around, or overwhelm him so soon after that fight... I mean, wow, the Hero Killer..."

It truly is a harrowing thought—the killer stumping the police and taking Heroes out left and right stopped and apprehended by three first year students. If that doesn't tell Shota he's in for a long year, he doesn't know what will.

He keeps the uneasy sigh threatening to fall from his lungs to himself.

“Understandable,” Shota bows his head in a nod. “I also have questions for them. I won’t be leaving, so you feel free. It would be illogical for me to leave any of my students alone, so I’ll stay until their respective guardians arrive.”

Not to mention he was one of those guardians.

“Right,” Manual shoots him a tiny smile before he’s stepping away. “Thank you.”

Shota bows his head a second time in acknowledgement, watching the blue clad Pro disappear down a hallway with signs labelling ‘Exit’. Shota lingers for a second longer before turning on his heels and stalking tiredly down the opposite hallway in an attempt to find the waiting room.

He passes the reception desk on his way to the waiting room, informing the receptionist that he’s an emergency medical proxy for all three of his students until their guardians arrive, and that he’d like to be informed when they’re settled in a room. He also gives them the information they need to get in contact with the student’s guardians before finally finding the waiting room and collapsing into one of the hard, uncomfortable chairs.

His eyes are begging to be closed, and his brain wants to shut off and sleep for a bit, but he forces himself to stay up. He busies himself with his phone, fiddling with the device he hadn’t touched since his draining and emotional call with Hizashi earlier that night.

The text from Izuku had come in around eleven PM, meaning that Shota had arrived on scene just shortly after twelve. Hizashi would’ve just been getting ready for bed after a long day—early morning patrol, teaching, followed by his prep at the radio station for his show.

Shota can imagine how exhausted Hizashi is going to be when he arrives.

He’d tried to talk Hizashi into sleeping for a while before making the trip to Hosu over the phone, at least when he’d calmed down enough that he wasn’t in complete hysterics, but Hizashi hadn’t even considered it, despite the curl of exhaustion in his tone.

Shota had pleaded that even just a short cat nap would’ve done some good, but his husband had been too worried about their foster kid to

even lie down.

His husband had downright refused, actually, and that was accompanied by the jingling of car keys and the apartment door locking behind him. Shota had wanted to be exasperated at Hizashi's antics, but then again, when he'd taken that call, he himself had been sprinting and leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

He knew Hizashi was just as antsy as he was to get to Izuku. He'd been in hysterics when he'd called Shota, rushing around the apartment and getting ready to leave.

Shota's just glad Hizashi had listened to logic instead of his protective heart.

They'd arranged for the blonde to bring the car and fight against traffic while Shota made his way to the kids in as timely manner as he could. Hizashi and his Quirk weren't suited for fast travel like Shota could with his capture weapon, so it was best for him to take that extra time and arrive safely. And with the car so they wouldn't need to taxi home when the kids (Izuku) were discharged.

Shota slumps in his chair as he finally unlocks his phone, skipping past the overflowing notifications marring his lock screen (he knows exactly who'd been blowing up his phone, and for what reason) and directly opening his texts logs with Hizashi.

Hizashi 1:42AM

Did you find him?

I'm stuck in traffic

Hardly moving

Sho?

Hizashi 1:45AM

I'm going to assume you found him if ur not answering me.

Is he okay?

He's okay, right?

Hizashi 1:49AM

Shota?

Plz tell me he's okay.

Ok. Ok Moving again, text soon.

Hizashi 1:50AM

Love you

He's glad to see Hizashi has managed to calm himself enough to text correct grammar—for the most part, at least— which means that his husband is also coherent enough now to be a responsible driver as well.

Shota knows sitting in quiet and just thinking helps Hizashi process things, which is why his husband tends to take his hearings aids out when he's overwhelmed. Being alone in a car, stuck in traffic is basically the same thing.

There's a brief period of no texts, Shota assumes traffic moved and Hizashi was focused on the road.

Shota 2:25AM

I found them.

At Hosu general hospital now, no word yet.

Hizashi's text comes fast enough that Shota has to reframe from letting out a tried snort of amusement. The urge is overpowered by a frown as he thinks about his students and where he's sitting right now.

Hizashi 2:25AM

Thank GOd

He's okay, yeah?

Tell me he's okay.

Can I talk to him??

WAIt

Them??

Shota, what the fuck?

Who else??

Shota takes a second to try and figure out how to ease his husband into this— *No, sorry, you can't talk to him. He's unconscious; was somehow cold enough that I'd be surprised if he didn't have hypothermia and is probably getting stitches because a fucking flying Nomu made an attempt at grabbing him and soaring off with him. He was only saved by the Hero Killer, who three of my idiot first year Heroics students, our foster child amongst them, decided to try their hand at taking him out. They did it, but they got beat to shit in the process*.

Just the thought of unloading all of that onto Hizashi makes Shota grimace—especially the thought of doing it over *text*.

Shota 2:27AM

I don't know the details.

They were a little shaken up by it all.

Izuku was not conscious when I got to him, but I'd rather tell you the details in person. I think most of this is better told in person, honestly.

Everyone else is okay, but I'm not giving you more to overthink while you're driving.

I don't want to worry you while you're driving. Please be safe.

Hizashi 2:28AM

A little late fro that, Sho

My current state is worry

Has been since zuku sent that text.

I am.

driving safe, I mean

Hizashi 2:29AM

Stuck in traffic again, bc the universe says fuck you.

Nothing is moving.

I wanna bang my head on the wheel

Wait wdym unconscious?

He'll be okay, right?

Shota 2:30AM

I'm sure he'll be fine.

It's Izuku. He's tough.

Shota leans back in his chair, biting at his bottom lip. He glares down at his phone, studying his own texts. It feels like the words stare back at him, almost tauntingly.

Will the kid be alright? Shota has been a Hero for a lot of years and he'd never felt someone's hand be so cold to the touch before. Someone who wasn't dead, at least.

The comparison of *that* is unsettling and leaves a bitter, vile taste in his mouth.

The dark-haired man squeezes his eyes shut as he forces out a calming breath through lips pressed in a straight line as to not let himself get worked up. He can't. Not now. Not when he has kids depending on him.

Shota 2:32AM

He'll be okay.

He's not sure if he's trying to convince himself or Hizashi with that last text, but he really tries to make himself believe it as he stares down at those words.

His head falls back against the wall, the thump echoing softly around the nearly vacant room. There's two other people waiting, but for what, he's not sure. Neither of them look in his direction at the noise, and he's grateful.

Shota settles his phone face down against his thigh, hand covering the back of it as he draws in even, supposedly calming breaths. It doesn't help much. It feels more like a hassle than it does calming.

He doesn't look at his phone until it vibrates against his thigh. Once, then twice. He takes one more breath before flipping it and looking at the notification on the lock screen.

Hizashi 2:38AM

About to move, be there soon.

Hang in there, alright? Love you.

Shota thinks about sending a text back—maybe returning the soft words— but decides against it. If Hizashi's moving again, he doesn't want to distract him. Last thing he needs to be visiting both his Problem Child foster son, and his Problem Adult husband in the hospital.

He lets his phone fall back against his thigh and blows out another slow breath.

Now he waits.

Izuku isn't quite sure where he is.

He doesn't... feel anything. Not pain or numbness. He doesn't feel right, exactly, but it's not a bad feeling. It's like he's floating—the antigravity feeling like when Uraraka uses her Quirk on you, but he's not moving. He's not doing... anything.

He doesn't quite remember what happened. Something did. Something big happened. He thinks he should remember it, but can't. He tries really hard to think back to what happened, but he comes up short.

Why does everything feel so fuzzy? It's not just his limbs and body feeling numb, it's his brain and memories as well.

He doesn't know where he is, but something about it feels familiar, in a foreign 'never been there but know of it' kinda way.

It's dark, like a void of some sort. Empty and consuming—not really anything of earth besides maybe Thirteen's Quirk blackhole, but he's fairly positive he's not trapped in Thirteen's blackhole Quirk. He'd probably feel more pain if he was. He'd seen what the Quirk had done to Thirteen when it had been used against her during the USJ attack.

Izuku's eyes drift downwards to where it feels like he's floating, but he knows his feet are flat on something. He can feel the angled like he's

stood on solid ground, but they're not—he can't even see his feet. There is no ground.

It takes probably far to long for him to notice the black misty... he's not sure what *that* is, crawling up his body. He thinks briefly of how unimpressed Shota would be with Izuku situational awareness, or, lack thereof.

The misty void-like stuff covers the bottom half of his body, but makes no move to climb any higher.

He feels his hips and legs and feet below it, numb with a soft pins-and-needles kind of feeling that isn't uncomfortable. He has no desire to move, though. It's not constricting—it's almost calming in a way.

Izuku blinks owlishly at the bottom half of his body. The darkness covering his lower half flickers off into a deep verdant green towards the end of the void's hold on him; outlining him from the rest of the void he's in.

The texture where the green tapers off towards the surrounding blackness of where ever he is, as well as where it meets the void Izuku is stood in appears almost staticky, pixelated, but different to that of the Villain working with the League of Villains. He's not sure, but something about it is different...

Which is why he's not scared.

There's no fear. He's not afraid.

It's familiar in a way too, but not familiar in a bad way.

"I've been waiting to meet you," a voice draws in Izuku's gaze.

There's someone else in the void with him. A man. Young, but not young like Izuku, or even like his teachers or ghost friend. He's middle aged, but in no way senior.

He looks worn down; pale hair and an almost sickly complexion. He looks malnourished and fragile. He doesn't quite... look real. Or, *alive* may be a better word for it. This, whoever this is, is closer to Oboro than he is to Izuku. This person is a ghost.

The longer Izuku stares, the more he thinks he's seen this man before or...

No, he hasn't seen *him*, he's seen his *eyes*.

A fleeting memory of eyes watching him during the Sports Festival, several pairs and All Might's observing with a ghostly glow, surrounded by staticky, black nothingness.

If he's seeing him here... where ever *here* is, then...

"I'm dead," the teen whispers out. The thought and words drop into his stomach like a brick. He feels it—the anxiety of it. He'd never thought anxiety would carry over.

"No," the ghost shakes his head, lips twitching faintly into a smile that doesn't stick. "You're still alive, Ninth. You gave it your best shot though, I'll admit that."

"Ninth?" Izuku breathes out, attention crawling up and down the ghost stood just out of arm's reach.

"Ninth wielder," the ghost corrects himself for Izuku's sake, cocking his head to watch the teenager, "of One for All."

"One for All," Izuku repeats quietly, breathily. "You... you're one of them. I-I saw you. At the Sports Festival. You were there, behind All Might."

"Yes," the ghost replies shortly.

"You helped me." Izuku blinks, he almost wants to move—to approach this ghost, but he doesn't. He stays in place and lets his limbs melt into the content numbness. "I didn't activate One for All that day... I *couldn't*. Y-you did it. H-how did you..."

"I am One for All," the ghost tilts his head. "It was mine before anyone else, so it's embedded to me, just as I'm embedded to it. My control fluctuates, and I can't very well wield it from my place, especially when it's in someone else's possession, but at times, very rarely, I'm able to offer aid. That hypnosis Quirk was powerful, but with your lack of control of your body, it gave me an opening."

"W-who are you?" Izuku sucks in a breath, eyes wide as he tracks the ghost's movements. The ghost doesn't really move—just shifts a little from foot to foot. "Where are... where are the other vestiges? There's seven of you, aren't there? I saw seven of you behind All Might that day..."

“Who I am isn’t important yet,” the ghost, First, Izuku will call him, shakes his head, “there’s much you must learn before I’m of importance, and the others aren’t of use to you now either. You don’t understand One for All, nor do you understand your own Quirk, though you make good progress. You’re not ready.”

“I- I’m not?”

“No.” First sighs, the sound coming out like a huff, but almost fond. “I’m afraid until you know your own Quirk, you won’t be able to fully learn what One for All is capable of for you.”

“How can I learn my own Quirk?” Izuku whispers, pleading to the ghost. He seems clever—that age-old kind of smart that you achieve from observing and retaining over the years.

“I’d start with learning what not to do,” First suggests with a one shouldered shrug, “you’re unconscious now. Why?”

Why...

He remembers being cold. So cold.

What had happened again?

He’d gone to find Iida, and sent out a distress map pin. Stain, the Hero Killer, was there and... and Todoroki showed up. He got colder. Todoroki didn’t hit him with his ice though, just the presence of it. Touching it, being close to it. It made him *feel* cold.

He ignored it. Being cold wasn’t a big deal. The more pressing matter was fighting Stain—saving Iida and Native and making sure he and Todoroki walked out alive too.

Then he’d... he’d offered up control to Oboro to use his Quirk—he'd been desperate. But the ghost had gone through. They’d both opened the connection, like usual, but it hadn’t worked. Why hadn’t it worked?

He remembers the strike of freezing shooting through his shoulder. The searing cold, like he’d plunged his arm in a vat of ice water—or maybe even liquid nitrogen. Cold. *Burning*, cold.

“I was cold,” Izuku angles his chin downward, muttering, but it’s not softening like it usually does—there's no need. He’d in his head, isn’t he? Or... is he in the Quirk? “It burned—but... but he... Oboro didn’t

even touch me. He went though, it was just cold."

"How do you usually feel ghosts?"

"Cold," Izuku wrinkles his nose uncertainly, "they're always cold when they get to close. They're like pockets of cold air, but when they touch you it... I don't know, it's like being bit with a snowball that splatters against you and... and melts through you. But cold melting instead of warm melting."

"Alright," First furrows his eyebrows, "and that half-fire half-ice fellow, what about him?"

"Todoroki?" Izuku hums thoughtfully, "it couldn't have been him. I... I fought him during the Festival. He used his ice first, and nothing—this didn't happen then. I've never felt that before."

"And us?"

"You?" Izuku blinks in surprise, "what about you?"

"We're cold," First replied calmly. "We're ghosts too. Vestiges, really, but same concept. One for All has all of our consciousnesses embedded in it. Mind, soul—who really knows? That's hardly different from your ghost friends in the living world—we're just internalized."

"I've never thought about that," Izuku hums thoughtfully. "I still don't know how I got so cold. What happened? I just got a little cold, and it started to hurt a bit. Surely it can't be that bad, right?"

"Ninth..." First eases slowly, hesitant and cautious, "you're hypothermic right now. You're unconscious because your body temperature dropped low enough your organs threatened to fail."

"I-I am?" Izuku swallows, suddenly feeling sick. "But..."

"What happened during that fight that hasn't before?"

What was different? Good question.

When he used his Quirk with Oboro, Todoroki was never around—no one was. It was a secret. You don't use a secret Quirk around other people, it defeats the purpose of keeping a secret.

And when he'd fought Todoroki during the Sports Festival, Oboro had already been gone at that point. He's not sure where the ghost had left to after accidentally using Izuku's Quirk, but he knows Oboro had

been quick to disappear; guilty and ashamed.

The vestiges were always around. They were a part of One for All, and One for All was now a part of Izuku. They would've been there for everything.

"It... it stacked," Izuku realizes with a frown. "The cold—Todoroki's ice, and Oboro's freezing touch, and you... you vestiges—all your cold attributes stacked one after another until I... my body couldn't handle it."

First gives him a slow nod, acknowledging they've now come to the same conclusion.

"We made ourselves prominent using your Quirk, just... differently than you do with the ghost outside of the Quirk," First tells him, bowing his head almost apologetically, "when you were making progress with One for All. We were praising you. Our presence and activity made your temperature drop like touching your ghost friend would."

He remembers that.

Voices in the back of his head that he didn't really know, but got the feeling they were the vestiges. Prominent alongside his own thoughts. Now that he really thinks about it, that's when he started to feel the chill crawling along his skin.

They're always there, he assumes if they're embedded in One for All, but they're not usually trying to be heard. They're dormant, he hadn't even known they existed until they made their presence known.

"I apologize for that, Ninth," First shakes his head, "we'll be more careful now that we know the repercussions of overusing your Quirk. If we'd have known..."

"It's alright," Izuku frowns. "I didn't know either, and it's my Quirk. You're not at fault, and Todoroki's not at fault, and Oboro isn't either. No one knew."

First studies Izuku for a second before shaking his head fondly, "you need to watch your Quirk, Ninth. Your temperature is vital if you plan on exploring your Quirk. It very well could be deadly, and might've been today if your ice-fire friend hadn't have lent you his warmth."

"I know," Izuku mumbles solemnly, almost feeling scolded despite the

fact he literally wasn't being scolded. First's tone is careful, yet serious.

"There's no guarantee that the cold won't stack again, even if I try to keep it from happening..." a thoughtful pause as Izuku rubs at his chin with his thumb and index finger, "maybe I can get the Support Course to help make a heated, cold resistance Hero costume? It would need to be light weight and mobile, so I'm not sure how the heater aspect will play into it, but I also can't rely solely on cold resistant either—ah, sorry—" Izuku snaps his jaw shut when he realizes he'd been mumbling.

First seems interested though, and waves him off with a stiff flap of his hand. "I hope for your sake those ideas can be made into a reality. I have faith in you, Ninth. We all do, including the eighth wielder who chose you."

Izuku's not sure why that feels as nice to hear as it does—he literally doesn't know this man past the fact he's One for All's first user. Still he tucks his chin against his chest as he gives a sheepish smile. He never has been good at accepting a compliment.

Izuku startled when he feels the numbness around his bottom half and legs waver, numbness flickering to flexing muscles like his limbs are waking up from the numbness.

"I suppose your temperature is rising," First's lips flicker up once again into a light smile.

"W-wait," Izuku gasps, "will I see you again? Y-you guys have been dormant since I got the Quirk but since the Sports Festival I've... I've felt you."

"We should lie low until you figure out your Quirk," First explains softly as Izuku winces as his toes flex and the pins-and-needles feeling gets more intense, "when we're dormant, we're not trouble for you."

"But—"

"We'll be here when you're ready," First promises easily, "hopefully by then you'll have your support gear in order."

A pause, Izuku's brain feels numb as he blinks slowly, forcing his eyes open, but now First the black void is crawling up the older man's body. It's mixed with a lighter, paler green compared to Izuku's.

The void doesn't stop at his hips like it had on Izuku, it continues up until just First's face is in view, the void reaching up his neck slowly, "Good luck, Ninth. I'll see you again."

By some holy power, all three of his students ended up in the same room in the pediatric ward of the hospital.

Shota was happy about that, since now he didn't have to make his rounds between rooms to check in on his students. He could find a chair and watch them all at once. Bless the Lord.

It's not long after he's finished texting with Hizashi that a nurse stops in front of him and informs him that the students have all been treated. He stands, joints crackling unhappily as he moves to follows her to their room.

He'll admit he's a bit surprised to find his kids have been settled into a room in the children's ward—he'd thought they would've been placed in the Hero section of the hospital, but he's not about to complain about it. That would be illogical and futile—all that matters is they're being treated.

He knows why they were put in the pediatric ward despite the fact that they're clearly Hero students; the hero ward, normally where Heroes, Heroics students included, would be treated, was packed with those licensed Heroes injured during the Nomu attacks.

It was a bit surprising how many Heroes had been injured or bedridden due to the League and those Nomus, but Shota couldn't judge considering a Nomu had almost killed him as well. He doesn't know the full story yet, or what exactly had gone down in Hosu outside of Stain—and to be fair there, he doesn't know the full story about Stain yet either— but he's sure he'll hear about it.

Shota honestly didn't care where the hospital put his students, so long as they were receiving treatment. Todoroki and Tenya, however, seemed a little miffed at the idea they'd been put in the children's ward.

It was almost like they forgot fifteen was still legally a *child*.

Shota is now seated pushed up against a wall. There're four beds in the room, all pressed close to a corner of the room. Tenya and Izuku are on one side of the room, and Todoroki is across from Tenya on the other side.

He'd pushed his chair so he was between Izuku and Tenya, but still able to keep an eye on Todoroki too.

The two teens that are awake have been mended up—in the old fashion way because the healing Quirks the hospital had employed were being spread around and used on more substantial and life-threatening injuries. His students just needed some stitches and bandages for the most part... well, except for Izuku.

Shota turns his head to the side where Izuku is still unconscious.

He'd been diagnosed with severe hypothermia—but the cause was a mystery.

The teen was wrapped in three warm, cotton blankets, and hooked up to an IV drip administering warm fluids in an attempt to raise Izuku's core temperature.

Knowing that Izuku had almost died, of overexposure to a cold that he couldn't place, no less, was probably one of the scariest things Shota had ever thought about.

His heart had been beating so slow, struggling to keep going. His breaths slow and shallow. His temperature had dipped significantly, settled at 81 degrees Fahrenheit when he'd arrived at the hospital, and that was with Todoroki's left side keeping him warm.

If Todoroki hadn't been there then... Shota doesn't even want to think about that.

Izuku hadn't stirred at all since Shota sat down in the room, and he's been sitting with them for roughly twenty minutes now. He'd be worried about the green-haired boy if it weren't for the steady heartbeat, and how the dark-haired man could see his kid's chest rising and falling with breaths.

As of now, Todoroki and Iida haven't said much, and Shota assumes that's because of his presence, but he'll be damned if he leaves them. Not until their discharged and taken away by their guardians.

Shota himself has his legs kicked out in front of himself, leaning back heavily in his chair. He has half a mind to sprawl across the fourth, unused bed, but desperately wants to be awake when Izuku comes to.

Shota does let his eyes slip shut for a couple moments of rest, but it's short lived.

His eyes snap open when the door is violently, yet quietly torn open. Hizashi is stood in the doorway, eyes instantly locked on Shota. He signs '*Sunshine*', the nickname he'd dubbed Izuku with, twice, frantically in succession, before his gaze drops on the green-haired boy.

Shota just blinks as his husband rushes to the bed from the door, barely pausing to close it behind himself. He perches delicately on the edge of Izuku's bed, taking care not to jostle him. He looks Izuku's relaxed, sleeping face over for a few long seconds before slowly reaching out to touch his cheek with the backs of his fingers.

He strokes Izuku's hair back, hand pausing on the teen's forehead like he's feeling for a fever, before he's petting his hair back again, nimble fingers carding through green locks. He's intently focused on their foster son, hardly aware of the room or people around him.

Shota stares for a second longer at Hizashi, who has yet to notice the other teenagers in the room, before he's glancing at Tenya and Todoroki to gauge their reactions.

Tenya looks surprised, watching Hizashi uncertainly. He knows that's Hizashi, but he's probably confused on why Hizashi is here, let alone fawning over Izuku.

Todoroki on the other hand, just looks confused. His eyebrows are knitted together as he watches—Shota doubts his student even knows that that's his English teacher carding his fingers through his classmate's hair.

"Sensei...?" Tenya's meek voice catches Shota's attention. He lulls his head in his student's direction, frowning when he notices Tenya's eyes flicking between himself and Hizashi.

Shota notices that Hizashi doesn't look towards him at the question—doesn't even flinch like he'd heard it. He responds to Tenya's voice. Shota angles his head and nearly sighs when he notes the lack of hearing aids. Of course.

"What?"

"Why is, uhm," Tenya looks towards Todoroki, who's listening intently, dual-coloured eyes now on his Class Rep instead of Izuku and Hizashi, "what is Hizashi doing here?"

"He's Izuku's guardian," Shota explains blandly.

Tenya jolts up in surprise, mouth agape as he stares first at Hizashi and Izuku, and then Shota. The underground Hero can already hear the question: *'You're Midoriya's guardian?'* because of course if Hizashi is, Shota would be too since they're married. What's yours is mine and all that marriage crap, right?

"Izuku?" Todoroki asks from across the room, one eyebrow arching in suspicion. Ah, shit. He'd almost forgotten Todoroki was here too. Todoroki looks back at Hizashi and Izuku, eyes narrowed and nose scrunching up.

Hizashi, as if feeling eyes on him, turns.

He catches Todoroki's eyes and Shota sees his husband stiffen, his eyes no doubt going wide as he places his student. The shock doesn't leave, but it does jump to Tenya, where it multiplys before dread pools in his features and he moves quickly to the other teen.

Tenya ducks his head in shame, cheeks heating up when Hizashi forces his gaze back up by two fingers under his chin, studying his face for injuries. Tenya relents, allowing Hizashi to angle his face as he pleases; the kid's used to Hizashi's touchy nature after all.

When Hizashi finally turns back to Shota the man arches an eyebrow before signing: *Hearing aids?*

Hizashi shrugs sheepishly. *Dead.* He pulls the hearing aids and charger out of his pocket, passing them to Shota. That's about right—he would've worn them at the studio and Shota knows better than anyone how bad Hizashi is at remembering to charge them.

He bets the hearing aids had made the 'low battery' noise before he'd left, so Hizashi had pocketed their charger, and then they'd died in the car.

Shota shakes his head, setting the charging hearing aids in his own pocket.

Hizashi is now back at Izuku's side, not touching him, but sitting beside him again. The blonde had tapped the railing of Izuku's bed to get his attention. *What happened?*

Stain Shota replies after a moment's thought. Hizashi's eyebrows furrow and his nose wrinkles as he follows the motions intently before he's shaking his head and lifting his hands in an 'I don't know' gesture. Shota huffs, thinks for a second, before adding: *Hero Killer.*

Hizashi gasps audibly at that, jolting up to look at the students again as if they hadn't just passed his onceovers. He gapes, looking between Todoroki and Iida, before looking back at Izuku and pointing to him.

It's a silent question of 'what about Izuku?' but Shota knows it's a conversation for when his husband can hear. He shakes his head signing a quick: *Later*and though Hizashi pouts when his gaze lifts from Shota's hands to his stern face, he doesn't push.

"Are..." Tenya clears his throat, eyes still on Hizashi, thought Hizashi isn't looking at him. Tenya knows a little bit of sign—less than Tensei, who is just fluent enough to be able to hold a conversation, but Shota doesn't think he understands what's been said. "Are we in trouble?"

"Yes," Shota doesn't bother sugar coating. Tenya wilts, and Todoroki frowns slightly. "I don't know what happened, but I know none of you were where you were supposed to be. When I arrived, neither of your mentors were with you two. You were supposed to shadow them, not run off on your own."

"What were you doing there, Sensei?" Todoroki asks slowly, "how'd you find us?"

"I assume we all got a text from Midoriya," he huffs. Tenya cocks an eyebrow like that's news to him, but Todoroki narrows his eyes at Shota thoughtfully.

"Midoriya texts you?" *Shit.*

"What text?" Tenya frowns.

Todoroki turns to look at him, head cocked like a puppy, "the location pin he sent out. I assume—" dual-coloured eyes jerk suspiciously to Shota before looking back at Tenya, "that everyone in Midoriya's contacts received the pin."

"So you didn't go help Midoriya?" Shota drawls slowly, watching his friend's little brother intently. "How'd you join their merry band of misfits then?"

Tenya shifts awkwardly, guiltily, before sighing. "Midoriya came to rescue me."

"Excuse me?" Shota's back stiffens as he sits up a little, "what the hell does that mean, Tenya?"

“It... it was my fault, Sensei,” Iida bows his head. “I... I left my mentor and I found the Hero Killer... and if it wasn’t for Midoriya I would be...” Iida swallows heavily, looking away. “I forgot who I was for a while there—*what* I was, but my peers helped me see how foolish I was for seeking revenge for my brother. It wasn’t heroic, it was selfish. I apologize for the trouble I caused!”

Shota stares as the information sinks in. Tenya had been the ring leader here? Out of character. He can see it though—the teen had been torn to pieces at the information Tensei may never walk again, let alone be Ingenium ever again.

Still, it was foolish, and dangerous, and after Shota and Hizashi lecture him, Shota will make sure Tenya’s mother and older brother are both aware of what he’d done and that he receives lectures from them as well. Tenya should know better. He knows how dangerous Stain was—had seen the damage he can cause with his own two eyes, and then he’d still thought he was tough enough to go after him.

“You’ve called both my classmates by their given names,” Todoroki draws Shota’s attention in. The man’s already tired of this conversation, but he can see the cogs turning in Todoroki’s head. He opens his mouth, but Tenya beats him to it.

“Sensei went to school with my brother,” Tenya explains slowly. “He knew me when I was little. He’s like... and uncle.”

“Oh.” Todoroki frowns. “What about Midoriya?”

“I don’t—”

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business,” Shota snaps, but it holds no heat to it. He’s too tired for heat. He just wants sleep. “Midoriya’s personal matters are of none of your concerns, respect his privacy.”

“Yes, Sensei,” Todoroki bows his head, but still looks suspicious.

“Of course, Aizawa-Sensei,” Tenya nods seriously, “it’s wrong of us to pry into our classmate’s personal lives.”

“That’s the spirit, Kid,” Shota encourages blandly. He leans back in his chair, spine curving again as he hunches down. He’s so tired.

Neither teen says anything more—they've already dug themselves into a hole, anything they add will be digging themselves deeper— and Hizashi is back in his own little world, staring down at Izuku and

thumbing across his cheek.

Shota lets his eyes close again, arms crossing over his chest and tucking in his capture weapon for warmth. A while passes—and hour, maybe two. He doesn't let himself fall asleep, but beside him, Tenya has drifted off.

Shota listens to the sound of evened out breaths from either side of him, keeping his eyes closed in feigned sleep. He stays like that until he hears Izuku stir. Hizashi is off the back when the kid moves as he wakes, and Shota stands to glance down.

Izuku's eyes open slowly, slivered and fluttering at the overhead lights.

"Problem Child," Shota finally lets his hand settle on the teen's forehead, pushing his hair back like Hizashi had been. The curls are soft under his fingertips, and his forehead is pleasantly warm. "How are you feeling?"

"Cold still, a bit stiff and... do I have stitches?" Izuku rasps, wrangling a hand out from under the blankets to rub at his eyes. He looks towards Hizashi, who smiles softly, then to Shota, who cocks an eyebrow before he becomes a tad bit more alert. "What are you guys doing here?"

"They tend to call you when your kid almost dies," Shota snarks, harsh words balmed over by the way his fingers carefully card through Izuku's hair. Izuku leans into the touch, eyes slipping shut for a second. "You do have stitches, quite a few, actually."

"Sorry," Izuku winces lightly, shifting in the bed, "didn't mean to."

"Problem Children like you never do," Shota sighs heavily. Even with the heavy sigh, he feels incredibly light now that Izuku is awake and coherent. "You should rest up, Kid. We can talk more when you're all warmed up and Hizashi's got his ears back."

Izuku frowns, turning to Hizashi.

The man had been attempting to lip-read. Hizashi cocks his head when Izuku looks over at him. The green-haired teen sheepishly waves in greeting and Hizashi lets out a quiet laugh as he returns the gesture, before his hand is dropping, settling softly over the teenager's.

They sit with their kid for a while, one of them on either side of the bed. Hizashi strokes Izuku's hair back, and the Kid pushes back into it eagerly. Shota rests back against the headboard, Izuku tucked into his side a little and using his arm as a makeshift pillow.

He doesn't seem entirely awake, but he's talking and warming up, and that's all that matters.

Neither teacher, or the green-haired boy, notice the half hot, half cold teenager watching them apprehensively, like they're a puzzle to be solved.

It's a while later that a knock sounds on the door, and a man with a mutated dog Quirk is easing the door open, looking surprised to see the two men on either side of Izuku. The two share a look, before glancing around at all their students.

"We'll be back in a bit," Shota offers to the two boys still awake. He passes Hizashi his hearing aids, and the man slips them into his ears.

"Hey, Listener," Hizashi finally greets softly. "Be right back, ya'dig?"

Izuku nods slowly, eyes darting between the two men and the man at the door.

The two teachers slip out behind the man with the Dog Quirk, and Izuku slumps back in his bed, eyes closing. They snap open when they hear his classmate's casual voice, and following that, he sits ramrod straight when the words register.

"I thought you were All Might's secret lovechild," Todoroki hums thoughtfully, not even looking at Izuku as he sputters in surprise—Todoroki had thought *that*? What the hell? "I was wrong, you're obviously *Aizawa-Sensei's* secret lovechild."

"T-Todoroki, he's not—I'm not—n-no I'm not!" Izuku cries out in shock. "I'm not anyone's secret lovechild!"

"You are definitely Aizawa-Sensei's lovechild," Todoroki nods to himself, "and that man was Present Mic. I thought Sensei was married to Midnight. Also wrong, he's married to Mic-Sensei."

"M-Midnight?! Todor—w-why??"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for lack of Oboro! Hopefully another ghostly figure makes up for that! He'll return in the next chapter, but I couldn't figure out how to include him here because this one's mostly following Shota. Yoichi (First) is someone else I don't know a whole lot about-- just what I got from the Wiki and the anime. Apologies if he's OOC!

Hope you liked the fluff stuff towards the end, because I sure did! Let me know what you thought, and as always, thank you so much for taking the time to read, comment and leave a kudos! It means the world to me!

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! Back again with another update! Sorry it's a bit late, things have been wild here. Work had been killer, and we've had to make 2 impromptu visits to the emergency room for two different people in my family in the span of 24 hours. Everyone is fine now, but my mom has since put a ban on us all using kitchen knives (rip to collective punishment, I didn't even do anything lmao). Been a bit stressful, but I'm glad to have this update finished up!
>
> Now, if you could read the notes at the end, I've got a couple things to say, and I'd like your guy's help with something if you're interested!
>
> Anyways, enough from me! Hope you like the new chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite the fact Izuku had been awake when his guardians were in the room, he didn't feel entirely like himself. His brain was lagging behind, and his body was sluggish. To be honest, it didn't feel too different from when he'd been trapped in One for All with First.

His body was in an in-between state of still kinda cold, but also pleasantly warm—but neither seemed to be cancelling the other out. It was odd. He's never felt like this—so cold and relying on other things like blankets and whatever was in that IV to keep him warm.

Izuku turns his head to the side, seeing Iida asleep without his glasses. He studies Iida for a second, looking for any signs of injury or distress. They'd fought the Hero Killer. Iida had been stabbed in the shoulder, but he appeared to be taken care of, sleeping peacefully.

Izuku pushes up onto his elbows so he can look across the room at Todoroki. The dual-haired teenager is awake still, thoughtfully staring down at his cellphone.

Izuku feels his cheeks heat up as his fuzzy brain thinks back to just after their teachers had left the room. Todoroki had never seemed to care much about what other students did, hardly spoke at all unless spoken to first, so Izuku had been floored to know the Number Two hero's son had been conspiring about his classmates, Izuku and their

teachers specifically.

Todoroki hadn't been completely wrong in his assessment, Sensei and Present Mic were in fact married—Izuku doesn't even want to know why the icy-hot teen thought Shota was married to Midnight, but he brushes the thought off in favor of letting a whole new flush sweep over his cheeks.

Todoroki had thought Izuku was All Might's child.

How could he be All Might's secret kid? The don't look like each other at all, but then again, One for All had been passed down to him. Todoroki has a point that it would make sense for Izuku to have the Quirk, or a variant of it, if All Might was his father—but the thought was still embarrassing. All Might, his father? How was he supposed to look the Pro in the eyes again? What would All Might even think about that?

Izuku bites his lip, gaze lulling to the door his guardians had just disappeared out.

And don't even get him started on the fact Todoroki now thinks Shota is his biological dad. The man signed up for fostering, not a full-blown son. Izuku will admit he looks a bit more like Shota then his does All Might, but he still looks like neither of them!

The green-haired teenager is just glad that neither Shota or Hizashi were there to hear what Todoroki had to say, though he's sure Hizashi would've gotten a kick outta it. Shota might've also thought it was funny—or maybe he would've just thought Izuku's sputtering, genuine mortified reaction to be funny.

Just thinking about that makes Izuku want to hide his face in his hands.

Izuku lets his eyes sweep over the room vaguely before he drops back into his pillows only to jerk right back up the second his brain recognizes he spotted something he wasn't expecting to.

Oboro is here—Izuku had thought he wasn't.

The ghost is as far away from Izuku as he can manage to be without leaving the room, pressed into the corner of the room like a cornered, wounded animal. He has his knees tucked up against his chest, arms laced around them; holding himself in a ball and making him look impossibly small.

His eyes are wide, watching Izuku intently like he's waiting to be yelled at, or told to leave—none of which will be happening. Izuku's heart breaks as his eyes catch Oboro's, but the ghost drops his attention so fast, Izuku barely has a chance to see his face.

Izuku stares, waiting for Oboro to look up again.

He could call across the room, and maybe he would if Iida and Todoroki both were asleep, but Todoroki is awake, laying on his side, and looking tired where he's focused on his phone, but he is still awake. His eyelids droop, but he seems intent on doing whatever it is he's doing on his phone.

It doesn't take long for Oboro's attention to flicker up again, eyes narrowing on Izuku like he's expecting the teen to just look away, and ignore him like the first time at eye contact was nothing but a fluke, but Izuku doesn't.

He gestures the ghost closer, and Oboro frantically shakes his head, "I can't..."

Izuku scrunches his nose up, looking briefly at Todoroki before gesturing him over again, this time patting the bedside too.

"No," Oboro winces at his own tone, curling in tighter to himself; chin balancing on his kneecap, "I can't, Izuku, you almost... I *can't*. We can't do this. I won't do this—do *that* to you."

Oboro's tone hurts Izuku's heart; hurts his entire being, actually. He sounds so distressed. Afraid. Sad. Anxious and fearful. His voice is a flurry of multiple emotions blending and mixing together in a heartbreaking way.

Izuku throws another cautious look in Todoroki's direction, before the teen turns his pleading eyes onto Oboro, "please."

His words come out as a whisper, and Todoroki doesn't stir from his focus. He doesn't look up, and there's no indication that he heard Izuku at all, but Oboro tenses where he's sitting at the near silent plea of the word. Izuku almost feels bad making him tense like that, but he also doesn't want to leave the ghost wallowing in guilt when it wasn't even *his* fault.

It's a long second as the ghost decides what he wants to do. He's silent across the room, eyes haunted and mouth pressed into a straight, nervous line like he thinks being in Izuku's general vicinity will make

the teenager suddenly and unexpectedly kneel over—

And it's a logical fear.

Izuku had gotten very sick, very fast. His body had dropped to dangerous temperatures at just minimal contact from the ghosts. Izuku would never blame any of them, holds no blame anywhere for what happened to him. Sure, Oboro, the vestiges and Todoroki had all been factors to Izuku's dangerously low temperature, but none had done so willingly.

Izuku refuses to blame anyone for an accident—after all, how're they supposed to know when Izuku himself doesn't? It's his Quirk that almost killed him, technically, the ghosts and Todoroki's ice side just fueled it.

Now Izuku knows though. He has a faint understanding of what played out—ideas of how to make sure it doesn't happen again, and he knows he'll be able to get Shota on board with his support item ideas and the new design for his hero costume that he's brewing up.

Despite just meeting him, Izuku trusts First's findings. The vestige who'd probably been studying Izuku's ghost Quirk since it manifested — maybe even since Izuku had taken possession of One for All— had helped him figure it out. It really wasn't anyone's fault. Not the vestiges, not Todoroki, and certainly not Oboro, who'd been learning Izuku's Quirk with him all the way through.

It seems like it all happened suddenly, but Izuku knows now that that isn't the case.

Oboro unfurls from where he's curled, pushing himself up and stepping closer to Izuku. He takes a couple small steps before stopping, eyeing the teenager. He doesn't look like he wants to come any closer, but Izuku waves him over once more.

Oboro's face scrunches up uncertainly, but he does take a couple more tiny steps. The ghost shuffles on his feet, more pretending to move than actually moving. When he's a couple steps closer, he raises his gaze to Izuku's, "happy?"

The green-haired teen shakes his head, hand patting the side of the bed next to him.

"I'm too cold," Oboro takes a tiny step backwards, hands wringing in front of himself, "c'mon, you almost died—don't make me come any

closer. Please.”

Persistently, Izuku pats the bed again. His heart goes out to the ghost, but at this rate, Oboro is never going to come closer than he is now. Izuku wants to talk to him, but he can’t with the ghost at such a distance. Todoroki is awake, and though he might not be paying attention now, he will if Izuku starts talking aloud to no one.

He gives another, firmer pat on the bed—glancing over at Todoroki who doesn’t lift his head from his phone. The dual-haired boy’s thumbs fly along his phone keyboard, and he appears very intently focused on his texting, or searching, or whatever it is that is holding his attention. The longer it does, the better for Izuku.

Oboro finally, very slowly, crosses the rest of the distance between them. The ghost carefully lowers himself to the mattress, jumpy and anxious like he thinks Izuku might reach out and grab him. It's weird to see the ghost so nervous about someone touching him, fearful for the *other* person instead of himself.

Izuku doesn’t like it.

“Is this what you want?” Oboro snuffs out, an uneasy frown on his face. Izuku gives a steady nod, to which Oboro grimaces, “you really do have a death wish, don’t you? I’m dangerous, Izuku.”

The snort is unvoluntary and it does draw Todoroki’s attention up from his phone. Tired heterochromia eyes find Izuku, who tucks closer into the blanket and blinks owlishly at the other boy in hopes Todoroki will find him uninteresting and turn his attention back to his phone.

He does after a long second of studying Izuku through squinted eyes.

The green-haired boy waits exactly ten seconds for Todoroki to immerse himself in his phone once again before he lulls his head expectantly in Oboro’s direction, “you’re not.”

His voice is hardly a whisper, so low that Oboro shifts a bit closer to hear him.

The face the ghost makes, put out and bordering on annoyed, would’ve been funny to Izuku if his movements weren’t so cautious and robotic. Oboro is taking great care to make sure he doesn’t touch Izuku at all—and even though he’s leaning closer to hear, he’s still perched on the very edge of the mattress ready to bail at any quick

movement from Izuku.

“What?” Oboro stammers out, leaning away from Izuku to eye him warily.

“Dangerous,” the teen frowns, not making any sudden movements that could send the ghost spiraling and launching away. It had taken far too much persuading to get him this close, Izuku isn’t about to lose it now, “you’re not.”

“You can’t say that while sitting in a hospital bed,” Oboro scoffs, words wavering as if he’s trying to sound tougher than he’s feeling, “in a hospital bed that I put you in. You almost died, Izuku.”

“But I didn’t,” the green-haired boy crosses his arms across his chest, making sure to telegraph his movements. With Izuku’s hands tucked into his own armpits, for both warmth, and to give the ghost peace of mind that he’s not going to try and touch him, Oboro’s shoulders lose some of their tension.

Izuku makes sure to keep his voice at a low whisper that only Oboro can hear, but the ghost doesn’t need to do that. He speaks normally, maybe even a little louder than he usually would.

“Only because, flame-boy over there was there,” Oboro quips, gesturing to Todoroki. “If he hadn’t of touched you, and realized that you were so cold that you were bordering on *hypothermia*, you would’ve... and, and it would’ve been b-because of me, Izuku. You’re only alive because of his warmth. What if he wasn’t there, huh? I would’ve killed you!”

“No, you wouldn’t have,” Izuku shakes his head. “If he wasn’t there, it wouldn’t have been as bad. It’s not your fault.”

Oboro freezes, gaze slowly flicking to Todoroki, who is completely unaware of his presence and the conversation happening around them, “did he... I didn’t see him do anything—”

“No,” Izuku blurts, a light hiss under his breath in defense, “he didn’t. Just like you didn’t and the vestiges didn’t—”

“The vestiges?” Oboro bristles in surprise, “those One for All ghosts? The ones All Might was talkin’ about—the ones you saw at the sports Festival, who haunt the Quirk? I thought they were dormant?”

“They were,” Izuku breathes out, fingers tapping patterns against his

side, under his arm, "*are*, I mean. Now, at least. First and I talked a bit and... well, he decided that they should just—you know what? Not the best time to get into that. They weren't, but now they are."

"Izuku, what the hell does that mean?" Oboro's mouth is agape, leaning in the closest to Izuku he had since the Hero Killer fight when they failed to activate the Quirk for the second time. "What have they been doing—"

"Later, please," the teen in question winces. "All that matters now is that they're trying to help. And because they're helping, this, whatever the hell happened here, won't happen again."

"It will happen again," Oboro's brow furrows and he leans away as if he just realized how close he'd been. "I almost killed you—your Quirk was dormant for a reason, Izuku, because it was dangerous. We've been playing around with it, and we've had no idea what we've been doing, and now you almost died. Quirk accidents happen—and they can be fatal."

"Exactly," Izuku finally untucks his hands, pressing his fingers against Oboro's chest, just barely touching him. It only touches the fabric of his tie, not enough pressure to push against his chest, but Oboro freezes like Izuku *is* touching him.

"Please, don't make me hurt you again," Oboro breathes out, genuine fear in his voice.

Izuku's knee-jerk reaction is to pull his hand away, but he doesn't. He can't have Oboro thinking like that. He can't. It's not his fault, and it's not the vestiges, and it's not Todoroki's, and it's not even Izuku's. Literally no one could've predicted it. It's not like Izuku has ever been surrounded by eight ghosts at once all using his energy, both inside and out, as well as an ice Quirk that drops the environmental temperature.

It just got too cold. There are ways to *prevent* that.

Izuku fights the urge to draw back just to calm Oboro down, but he knows if he does, the ghost will put distance between them again. Izuku keeps his hand steady, frozen in place like Oboro is as he finally lets out a calm breath. He's proud that is comes out only *slightly* breathy. "It was an accident. I don't know for certain, I can't— and you know that, but we think I get too cold because of multiple forces. It wasn't because any one thing, it was because of *all* of them at once."

“We?” Oboro echoes gently, still frozen.

“I’ll tell you, but I want to know if I take my hand away will you leave?” Pause where Izuku stares down at where they’re almost touching, Oboro’s chest expanding with breaths he doesn’t need to have, before looking up and catching his eye, “you’re no threat to me, I promise you.”

One long second of thought, “no... I won’t.”

Izuku believes him, slowly withdrawing his hand to settle in his lap. He trusts Oboro not to move enough that he glances at where Todoroki is now asleep. His phone is tucked between limp hands, having fallen asleep still using it. The screen had gone completely blank from lack of activity, so for a second, Izuku wonders when the dual-haired boy had fallen asleep. His face is relaxed with sleep, tension drained from his expression and breaths coming out slow and steady.

Izuku’s not sure how he’d managed to keep his voice low and quiet enough that Todoroki didn’t hear, let alone that he managed to fall asleep, but he’s forever grateful for the fact.

Izuku glances over to where Iida’s chest rises and falls with similar sleep guided breaths.

Izuku darts his attention to the clock on the wall, reading the numbers. He supposes that they should be exhausted—it's early morning at this point, the sun is starting to stream into the room where the blinds aren’t quite closed all the way.

Izuku knows they’d both been up all day yesterday, and all night. He assumes it was quite hectic while he was unconscious, so he’s glad to see them both finally getting some sleep. They deserve some rest. It was a long night, and Izuku can only imagine the stress they were feeling when it came to him too.

Izuku does another quick check between his sleeping classmates before finally looking back at his friend who hadn’t moved. Izuku’s heart warms at the fact Oboro didn’t leave, had barely shifted on the bed.

“Do you really promise I won’t hurt you?” Oboro’s voice jolts Izuku from his warmth. He glances over, but doesn’t catch Oboro’s eyes. The ghost is staring down at his hand, interlocked together and set in his lap. “Can you even promise that?”

“I do,” Izuku gives a light nod. “I can’t promise it won’t *ever* happen again, like I said, it wasn’t any one thing that did it, but I can promise that for now, it won’t happen again.”

Oboro lifts his head at Izuku’s words, studying him cautiously. “How do you know?”

“I talked with First,” Izuku mumbles, picking at a thread on the blanket. “While I was unconscious.”

He sees Oboro’s face twist in question, mouth opening to ask, but Izuku beats him to it, “I really don’t know a lot, Oboro, it was only... I don’t know. Time is different there, I think, but First, the, uhm, the first user of One for All—he didn’t tell me his name so I just, g-gave him one— but he helped me understand the Quirk, *my* Quirk, a little and I know there’s things I can do to try and stop this from happening again...”

“Wait... wait, wait, wait. You were talking to the vestiges?” Oboro blinks in shock, “*h-how*? Are they, like, in your head or something? I didn’t see any other ghosts—but to be fair, I don’t usually see any ghosts, it’s like just me most of the time, but—”

“No,” Izuku shakes his head, the corners of his lips twitching up into a faint smile. He sobers quickly, “I... I think I was *in* it—” Izuku looks faintly at Todoroki, then at Iida before dropping his voice as low as he can manage, “—One for All. ”

“You were in a haunted ghost Quirk with the ghosts that haunt the Quirk? Wait, better question, you were *in* a Quirk?”

“Just... just one ghost,” Izuku wrinkles his nose. “First said I’m not ready to meet the other vestiges.”

“Why not?”

At this, Izuku lifts a shoulder in a light shrug, pulling his knees up to his chest. His body still isn’t completely steady, numbness residing in his limbs a bit, but he managed the action easily enough. “He said I need to learn my Quirk before I can truly learn One for All.”

“That’s not ominous at all.”

“Coming from a ghost,” Izuku snorts a quiet laugh into his knee, and Oboro glances in his direction, a bashful look on his face. “Kidding. I actually agree. But I also think First knows what he’s talking about.

Something about my Quirk... it'll have to do with One for All. I don't know why, or how, but I believe him."

"But it's dangerous," Oboro's voice returns lowly, genuinely concerned. "Is it worth it if this can happen again? You really did almost die, Izuku. I was with you the whole time..."

"I think it is," Izuku's gaze bores into the wall across from him. "I'm going to learn how to use my Quirk, and then I'll learn One for All. And, I'd like to do it with you. I trust you, but I won't force you either. First wouldn't have mentioned it, *guided* me, if he didn't think it was important."

"I don't want you to get hurt," Oboro shakes his head, finally shifting on the bed and leaning back against the headboard. Their hips are by each other, almost pressed against the other's as they sit together on the single bed. It's like a weight off Izuku's shoulders that Oboro is slowly calming down; letting himself get so close without worry of repercussions. "I don't want to be the one to hurt you. Not again."

"You didn't hurt me." Izuku finally looks to his side, taken aback by the scowl the ghost is shooting in his direction.

"You cried, Izuku," the ghost tells him, "when I tried to touch you again. When I tried to... when I tried to use your Quirk. You cried out. I hurt you. And after that, it all went downhill."

"Everything hurt me," the teen corrects softly, "and I invited you to use my Quirk. *I told you to*. It was not your fault. The vestiges had been using my energy since the Sports Festival, and Todoroki's ice dropped the temperature. You were just the tipping point, your cold stacking on top of everything else until my temperature just... *dropped*. I don't blame anyone, and neither should you."

Izuku pauses, ducking his eyes away from where Oboro deflates a little beside him, "I'm sorry I scared you, but it's really not your fault. No one's at fault. It was an accident, and now we know better. Trial and error."

"You almost died."

"But I lived," Izuku can't help the light laugh. It does as desired, because Oboro lets out a breath, shoulders losing the tension as he does so. "I survived, and now I can make the changes so it doesn't happen again, or so it doesn't happen when Todoroki isn't around. If you think about it, it's a good thing this happened now, huh?"

“There will never be a good time for you to almost die,” Oboro huffs out, but he doesn’t sound as afraid anymore. It’s not a tease, but it’s as close to it Izuku thinks he’ll get for a while. “I get what you mean though.”

Izuku gives his friend a small smile, shifting a little so he’s lying in the bed instead of sitting. He’s pretty tired despite the fact he’d been unconscious for most of the night.

“Tired?” Oboro cocks his head, watching as Izuku inches himself down so he can spawl across his half of the bed. “You were out for a while, but I guess you were unconscious instead of asleep. They’re different, aren’t they?”

Izuku shrugs, letting out a little yawn as his eyes drift shut before he forces them open again.

“I’m gonna sleep while everyone else is too,” the green-haired boy tells him as he lets his eyes shut again. He pauses for a second, blinking one eye open to glance up at Oboro, “stay?”

“Just until Sho and ‘zashi come back,” the ghost tells him after a second of hesitation. He shifts a little, relaxing back against the headboard, but still taking care to not touch Izuku at all, “when they’re back, I’ll stay in the room, but I’m getting off the bed.”

“Okay.”

It’s mid-morning by the time Izuku wakes again.

He’s alone in his hospital bed, but a second chair had been brought into the room, and Hizashi has it pushed up against Izuku’s bedside. Shota had resumed his position in the original chair located between him and Iida, and he’s having a quiet conversation was a thoroughly scolded looking Iida.

Across the room, Todoroki is still passed out, now tucked under his blankets with his phone set safely on the bedside table. Izuku wonders if it was Shota or Hizashi who’s done it—the thought of either of them being so soft with Todoroki has Izuku smiling into his covers.

True to Oboro’s word, he’s still in the room. He’d tucked himself back in the corner Izuku had found him in. His legs are stretched out before him, and he seems to be listening in on the conversation between Iida and Shota.

The ghost, almost as if sensing Izuku's eyes, glances over and throws him a tiny wave. He doesn't make any move to speak, or get up. The hospital room is quiet, but comfortable.

The three teenagers don't hear the news of what the Hosu Police Chief wants to do until after Todoroki is awake and the three of them have been fed.

Their teachers hadn't said anything since any of them woke up, but to be fair, none of them had really questioned them yet either. It's just Shota and Hizashi who're in the room when the conversation finally happens, and Izuku wonders if that's because the Police Chief wanted the two teachers to tell the students the plan, or if their teachers fought to be the ones to break it to them in privacy.

"None of you have your licenses," Shota tells them sternly, "I don't like it either, but there's not much we can do. We either accept the offer, or you three will be charged with unlicensed Quirk usage. This will hit the media, and after the USJ, it's not the kind of coverage the school needs right now."

"So, Endeavor gets the glory?" Todoroki asks slowly. He doesn't sound like he wants the glory, just that he doesn't want Endeavor to have it. The dual-haired teenager is sitting on the edge of Izuku's bed now, looking at their two teachers who're stood between Izuku and Iida's beds. "He didn't even show up until the end, after Stain took down the Nomu to save Midoriya. He made it worse. Why should Endeavor get the praise?"

Izuku opens his mouth before promptly closing it. He sorta remembers that... it's just hazy. Izuku watches as Shota and Hizashi share a look —it's quick and fleeting, but he'd been living with them long enough to know some sort of conversation took place between dark and bright eyes.

"Partially," Hizashi stands up straighter, running his fingers through his own hair, "a statement will be made saying an unnamed underground Hero managed to catch Stain, and that Endeavor is just the Pro to make the official arrest and detain Stain and the Nomu until the police could arrive—which is true. Endeavor has already agreed to it, and is willing to make a press statement on the matter as soon as he's given the go ahead."

The three teens remain silent, looking between each other. Todoroki doesn't seem particularly pleased, but he doesn't say anything more

on the matter.

Shota takes their silence as a cue to continue, “none of you will be mentioned, and that’s a blessing. I know it doesn’t seem fair now, and it’s *not*, but there’s nothing we can do about it without jeopardizing your upcoming careers. We— Mic, the police chief, all three of your internship mentors and myself— have all agreed it’s for the best.”

“We don’t get any say?” Izuku cocks his head to the side.

“Do you really *want* any say?” Shota lulls his attention to Izuku. Izuku must grimace at his words because the man’s lips twitch the faintest bit and he shakes his head before continuing, “this could’ve gone worse than it did— you three were in a place you should not have been, all three of you ignored direct orders from your mentors, and by association, all three of you ignored my orders and Yuuei school protocol. We’re lucky the chief of police even offered the cover-up, or you three could be facing fines, expulsion, and maybe even jailtime.”

There’s a heavy silence in the room as Shota’s words sink in.

Izuku sucks in a breath that feels like it gets stuck in his lungs. There’s a gravity to this that Izuku hadn’t even thought about. He’d just wanted to make sure Iida was alright, and he knew he couldn’t have done it alone.

The text he’d sent out was a desperate plea, and he’s beyond grateful Todoroki figured it out, or he, Iida and Native might not have made it out of that fight alive in the end, and Stain would still be roaming the streets looking for his next victim.

“I know this sucks,” Hizashi sighs, looking between the three of them, “you three did something no one else could, and you should be praised for it, but you did it illegally. We’re being thrown a bone here; you’re getting let off scot-free this time because you caught the Hero Killer. It’s for the best, as awful as that is.”

“So if we accept then... none of this will reflect back on our school? On... on our classmates, or our teachers and mentors?” Iida is staring down at his lap as he speaks. “It just... won’t have happened?”

“The school will be told the same as the general public,” Shota tells them calmly, “as is, if we weren’t already here— if Midoriya hadn’t of gotten in contact with us— we would never have heard about this. Assuming this played out relatively the same, I would’ve been fed the same story we’ll be telling your guardians, or not even *told* about your

hospital admittances at all."

"Can they even do that?" Izuku blinks in surprise, "you're our teacher —can they just... *not* tell you?"

Shota's face twists in a disgusted grimace before it returns to neutral like the expression hadn't existed at all, "to protect you three, this would've been a need-to-know situation, and I don't technically need to know. I doubt this would've made its way to me—any of it— had we not already been here. This might've played out differently if that was the case, but we were here, and we fought for this to be swept under the rug."

A pause, as Shota looks at them all, watching them over the tip of his nose, "so no, none of this will make it back to, or reflect on Yuuei, the teachers, or your peers. Principal Nezu and the staff will be fed the same cover-up story, and the student will only know what they see on the news."

That's a relief. They can't be expelled for something that there's no proof of, or no police report of.

"What about our guardians?" Todoroki asks quietly, hands settled in his lap. "What do I tell my sister and brother when they ask?"

"I will be calling all of your emergency contacts as soon as we're finished here." Shota grunts out easily, looking tired of the phone calls he hadn't even started making yet. "None of you are in any shape to continue your internships, and though not all of you will need to stay in the hospital, you're all on strict bedrest until after the internships have finished and you return to classes."

"All your guardians will get the same story: the three of you got injured during the Nomu attack in which you were helping your mentors with civilian rescue and evacuations," Hizashi continues on, plopping into the chair Shota had been sitting in all morning.

The dark-haired man doesn't move from where he's standing, gaze flicking between the three teenagers as if judging their states from nothing but their blank stares.

Hizashi treks on, speaking calmly, "this is a hush-hush situation, and we're trying to keep it that way. With this cover-story, none of you were here, no one left their posts, and you three had no contact with the Hero Killer."

There's another lingering of silence.

Shota blinks owlishly after a second of heavy silence, attention lulling between the three boys, "so, are you three on board?"

"I don't think we have much of a choice," Todoroki shrugs.

And they really don't.

The police chief comes in a little while later to officially greet them. He's a bit intense at first, but he seems kind enough; thanking them for the help with catching Stain, but not apologizing for the lie they're making up. Izuku knows it's to protect them in the end, but it still doesn't seem fair.

It's nice to get a little bit of praise for it.

Still, they keep up pleasantries until the police chief dismisses himself to prepare for the press conference on Stain, and the onslaught of media awaiting answers.

All three of their mentors drop in—

Endeavor scolds Todoroki, but the teen doesn't seem phased. He doesn't so much as bat an eyelash at the annoyance in the Number Two Hero's tone, which in turn seems to annoy Endeavor even more, enough so, that he just ends up leaving after telling Todoroki that his sister is on the way to pick him up and bring him home, since the man will be busy with Hero work, the media and the cover up.

Todoroki once again doesn't seem phased that his father won't be bringing him home—in fact he almost smiles when his sister is mentioned. Izuku's not sure what's up with that, but he knows from that short conversation he'd had with Endeavor, that the man isn't very family oriented.

Manual arrives in only an hour or so after Endeavor leaves. The blue clad Hero lightly scolds Iida, telling his what he did was stupid before also telling him that what he'd done was pretty brave—Manual congratulates them all for the arrest with a tiny smile.

Gran Torino is the last to arrive to make an appearance, and he ends up smacking Izuku's forearm a little harder than probably necessary, but keeps his distance after noticing both Shota and Hizashi glaring daggers at him. Gran Tornio insists it won't be the last they see of each other, and Izuku knows that's probably the truth. Gran Torino

and All Might know each other, and if Gran Torino can help with One for All, All Might will probably be seeking help from his own mentor.

Shota and Hizashi don't leave the room once between it all.

Izuku has to stay in the hospital for a couple more days after everything gets sorted out.

Todoroki is the first to be discharged, leaving with his sister that same afternoon that the arrest of the Hero Killer makes the afternoon news, with Endeavor being the face of the arrest.

Iida gets discharged the following morning—his mother arrives in to pick him up, a face of worry and irritation. Though nothing was said about their involvement when it came to Stain, Izuku thinks that the woman might've pieced it together. The *'First Tensei, and now you! What am I going to do with you boys?'* being a bit of a giveaway.

Either way, Iida looks painfully shamed and apologetic as he tries in vain to console his mother.

Iida-San exchanges kind words with Shota and Hizashi, the three of them talking about Ingenium and his recovery a little bit before the woman is ushering Iida out of the room, and promising that he'll be looked after. Hizashi waves them off enthusiastically, and even Shota spares a light smile from the corner of the foot of Izuku's hospital bed.

Izuku is only released from the hospital when his temperature is completely normal. He'd long since gotten his IV taken out, and was no longer required to be under the blankets. He had full range of motion back in his limbs, and the numbness had faded. His stitches were healing nicely, and at the rate they were going, he probably wouldn't even need to visit Recovery Girl and get the wounds fixed up.

It's late night Thursday evening by the time they're all home, and Hizashi decides he should probably go to school the following morning.

He'd already taken two full days off to be with Izuku in the hospital, but since the teen was home safe and sound, and Shota would be able to stay with him since the rest of his class was still at their internships, the blonde decided to check in with his non-Hero course students.

It's Shota and Izuku in the living room (and Oboro, but he doesn't really count) when Izuku decides to breach the subject of support

items.

“Do you think I can make some changes to my Hero costume?” Izuku asks cautiously.

The tv is on, playing an old movie that Izuku remembers watching years ago—maybe at Kacchan’s house or something. Shota, at his side, doesn’t appear to be paying any attention to the film, lost in his own thoughts, but his attention does flick up to Izuku instantly.

“Your class just made adjustments to your costumes. You should’ve adjusted it then, with everyone else.” His tone isn’t even scolding, it’s just tired. It’s fair too—they had just been offered the chance to upgrade things, or talk with PowerLoader about support items before their internships.

The teen is quiet for a second, staring down at his hands unsure how to continue, until Shota lets out a deep sigh, full attention settling on Izuku’s face, “why?”

“I...” Izuku fiddles with his own fingers, shooting a quick glance to where Oboro is watching quietly, “I just realized something about my Quirk. Well, not, uhm, not *just*, but over the internship.”

“Oh?” the man hums out, tone coming out in a half-interested, half-uninterested drawl, “and what might that be?”

“It... it drains my internal temperature.”

Shota jerks upright, “what?”

Izuku jerks up at Shota jerking up, letting out a quiet gasp of surprise as Shota sits up from his slump with an almost urgency, “it does what to you?”

Izuku blinks wide, surprised eyes at his guardian as his mouth opens and closes like a floundering fish. He has things to say, but he can’t for the life of him figure out how to say them; not when Shota is piercing him with a concerned gaze.

“It just, I dunno,” Izuku swallows, “I think it... it takes a lot of energy to use it, and it... uses my temperature as a battery source? I don’t know... I got so cold, and... and the only thing that was different was that I think I over used it—like when I was working with Gran Torino. I was cold, but I, um, I didn’t really notice until it was too late?”

“Izuku, Kiddo, you almost died.”

Izuku is getting very tired of people pointing that out. “I know.”

“Your Quirk did that to you?”

Yes. 100%. Maybe not One for All, but his Quirk definitely did. “I think so.”

“God, Izuku,” Shota drags a hand through his hair stressfully, glaring up at the ceiling before looking back at the teenager beside him, “why didn’t you say anything before?”

“I just realized,” Izuku whispers, squeezing his own fingers to calm himself down, “I’ve always been cold, so it was no big deal at first, but then I started getting colder with Gran Torino, and then the Nomu attacked, and Iida was... I couldn't—I couldn’t just *not* help them; they’re my friends, and Native was in trouble, and I’m a *hero*—I couldn’t just walk away because I got a little cold.”

“That wasn’t ‘*a little cold*’, Izuku,” Shota narrows his eyes, “you developed hypothermia— if Todoroki hadn’t of kept you at his side until you could be treated at the hospital, Kid, you would’ve...” Shota swallows. He takes a shaky breath before his eyes are back on the teenager, “you’ve never noticed it before?”

“No,” Izuku shakes his head guiltily. He has always been cold—ghosts were cold. When they were around, his temperature always dropped faintly. But this had been different. It was overuse, just not overuse of the Quirk Shota was thinking of. “I’m sorry.”

“No,” Shota narrows his eyes, “never apologize for Quirk side effects, Kid. No one could’ve known it was your Quirk negatively affecting your body all this time. Fuck, just when I think I have you figured out, you spring something new on me. Your Quirk *specifically* is going to be the reason I go grey before this school year lets out.”

“Sorry,” Izuku mumbles again, but this time with a tiny smile.

Shota gives him a sideways look before huffing out through his nose, “yeah, yeah,” the man scoffs, but a tiny smile teases at his lips. “Now, what did you have in mind for those adjustments, and I better be hearing something about a *heater* of some sort.”

“Y-yes! It does!” Izuku straightens up, launching into the ideas he’d been thinking about since his conversation with First. Izuku tells the

man about the cold resistant suit he'd been thinking of, and the layer of cold-charged insulated wiring sandwiched between layers of woven cloth—it's essentially just a cold powered electric blanket but in a Hero costume form.

He'd only had a couple days to play around with the idea, but Shota seems pleased with it. The man hums in agreement at some of the points, and give nods of encouragement when Izuku wavers off awkwardly.

"Monday after school we'll drop in to see PowerLoader," Shota tells him when Izuku's mumbling has faded off and he's said what he needed to get out. He feels lighter now that Shota knows, *kinda*, about his problem. "I'm sure he'll take what you have and run with it—that's a really good idea, Problem Child."

"D-do you think so?" Izuku rubs the back of his neck sheepishly. "I wasn't sure how to make work without needing to charge it. I'd be pretty useless if my suit died mid battle."

"And you're positive it'll always be charging? What it it's hot and sunny outside?"

Izuku catches Oboro's eyes across the room. The ghost's face is painted with a wide, knowing smile.

"I... don't think that'll be a problem," Izuku finally mumbles, a light smile on his own face as he looks back towards Shota.

"Whatever you say, Problem Child. Now, go put a sweatshirt on, or grab a blanket or something. I'm cold, so you must be freezing." Izuku just laughs when he relaxes back into the couch like Shota hadn't said anything at all, and laughs even harder when his guardian tosses the blanket over the back of the couch onto Izuku, the folded mass hitting the teen's head (and dropping Blanket the cat, who'd been peacefully sleeping in the folds, at Izuku's side).

Izuku's not sure how he ends up sharing the blanket with his homeroom teacher. He doesn't mind it at all—it's actually pretty nice. Comfortable and warm.

Shota falls asleep almost as soon as he's under the blanket, Izuku's feet in his lap, which leaves Izuku and Oboro to watch the film together. Oboro chats through it, and Izuku only offers short responses after chancing looks at his guardian to make sure he's really asleep before each answer.

Izuku doesn't know when he falls asleep too, or when he shifts so he's cuddled into Shota's side.

He's woken up by light, poorly masked squeals, and Shota is grumbling at his side. The underground Hero, tucks Izuku close— and *when* had Shota wrapped an arm around him??— and before Izuku knows it, Hizashi is showing them both pictures of the two of them asleep, calling them cute and jerking out of Shota's sluggish attempts at shoving him away.

Izuku can only hide his face in his hands and the blanket as embarrassment lights up his features, and smile as Oboro refuses to leave his side, teasing him good-naturedly.

The green-haired teen has never been happier to be annoyed in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully that chapter was okay. Lowkey wrote myself into a bit of a writers block, but I found my way out. Hopefully this wasn't boring, I try to brush over things that don't differ from the anime, but sometime I gotta write more than I'd like to make it flow :(

So, firstly, I'd like some help from you guys if you're willing! I'm Canadian, and I need a bit of help from any American readers! My family is going to America over Easter weekend, but I was voluntold to be the petsitter, so I wasn't really invited. My parents said they'll bring back snacks and stuff for me, but I have no idea what to ask for?? I'm just curious what some of your favorite snack things are from the US? We don't have much variety here, so I'd love some suggestions! Any help would be very much appreciated!

Now! Secondly, I'd like to tell you guys that I made this into a series, and, more importantly, there's a new part to the series if you haven't already found it! I wrote a wisdom teeth fic set between this chapter and the next chapter. The fic is called Pre-Quirk Problems, so check that out if you're interested! I had a lot of fun writing it!

Anyways, as always, thanks so much for taking the time to read! Comments are greatly appreciated, as are kudos! It makes me so happy to see that people are liking this fic as much as I am! <3

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello~! Welcome back!

Thank you so much to everyone who recommended American snacks for me! My parents absolutely failed at the list, even though they asked for it. It was basically just a 'throw anything in the cart they think I'd like' kinda thing, but I'm very grateful to everyone who offered help! I have a lot of new American treats to try, and they managed to get a couple things you guys recommended (purely by luck).

Now, as a bit of a warning I guess? There's been a bit of a change to the story. Nothing big, I promise. I just needed a character for something I have planned in the next chapters. I've gone back and altered a couple chapters, just like a sentence or two during the Sports Festival chapters. Literally no plot changes, just a relationship. Also, no idea how to really wite this character, so that's fun!

I don't want to spoil anything now, but I'll say more at the end! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nothing changes when it comes to school Monday morning. Izuku, Iida and Todoroki speak not a word of their internship escapades. There's chatter about the Hero Killer, of course. It's a Hero school, and everyone would've watched the news or even just heard the news that the Hero Killer: Stain was finally off the streets.

There's a small, prideful part of Izuku whenever he hears someone mention the Hero Killer, and he knows Todoroki, and Iida to a lesser degree, all feel that jolt of pride. Maybe no one would ever know it was the three of them who'd taken out the current most wanted criminal in Japan, but the three of them always would, and they'd always share that.

Izuku is proud to say that following that dark night in the alley way, and the long, exhausting hospital visit where he'd almost died, he managed to become closer with his friend, and he likes to think that Todoroki is a friend now too.

He'd strengthened his relationship with Iida, and gotten a new friendship with Todoroki, and he's quite happy with the outcome—though it would've been nice for all that to happen without the three of them battling a wanted serial killer, and himself almost dying, but beggars can't be choosers.

It all worked out in the end anyways, right?

Their classmates had all just been happy to talk about their own experiences interning with a vast selection of Pros. Izuku is excited to hear about it all, but deep down he knows very few of his classmates will be able to top taking down a serial killer—well, Tsu and her smugglers bust comes fairly close. Especially since the three of them *can't* tell their peers about what they'd actually accomplished on internship.

After school, Shota walks Izuku down to see Power Loader after their Heroics class.

They hadn't done anything that needed their costumes, and Izuku has a sneaking suspicion that that's just because Shota doesn't want Izuku participating in class when there's a chance he might drop to a hypothermic cold randomly due to Quirk usage. He seemed intent on getting the new costume sorted out with all the added features, and Izuku can't lie and say he's not grateful for the speed.

Despite Izuku's promise that he probably won't get as cold as he had in that alley with Todoroki after having the vestiges using all his energy, Oboro is still hesitant to get to close, or use their Quirks at all—not that there had been reason, or a chance to use their Quirks.

It's not like Izuku's spent much time alone between the hospital visit and coming home to the apartment.

Shota and Hizashi really had made good on that 'strict bedrest' order, and Izuku had found himself lounged on the couch, near constantly swaddled in blankets and sweatshirts.

He's not quite sure how to feel about being coddled—his mother had never been the type, and her motherly affections faded off by the time he started preschool and *could* survive on his own, so to be under Hizashi and Shota's watchful eyes; having them deliver food to him at meal times so he doesn't have to get up, and tucking blankets around him when they slip down or the cats rumple them, it's odd, and it leaves him feeling a bit awkward and uncertain, but at the same time, it fills him with a softness he's not sure he's ever had lighting up his

chest.

He's never really had people who *wanted* to take care of him; he'd grown up fending for his himself because his mother was always busy, or at work, or pretending she had a *normal* child, and in doing so couldn't be around him and his... *weirdness*. That would've ruined the façade.

She wasn't around, and it was just the two of them after his dad took off, so he learned to rely on himself. To tend to himself, and care for himself. To be able to feed himself, and clean up his own scrapes and burns.

That's all he'd ever known, so this, having two men, his teachers, no, *guardians*, tending to him is... nice? But also weird. Completely and utterly *weird*.

But maybe he could get used to it?

So, he doesn't really mind he doesn't have more than a couple minutes alone—he sorta craves the attention in a way. A small, subconscious part of him is just reveling in the fact they want to be close to him. That they want to care for him. That they look at him and see a normal kid—not like how his mother, auntie, uncle and Kacchan had always looked at him. Like he was strange and unwell. Delicate. *Different*.

In the end though, Izuku's just glad Oboro is finally starting to relax around him again. He might not be ready for Quirks to be a part of their dynamic again just yet, but he's finally started sitting beside Izuku again. Baby steps. Plus it's not like there's a moment to play around with the Quirks when Shota and Hizashi were keeping a watchful eye on him.

Though he can't quiet push for using the Quirks, for learning more about them, Izuku is happy to have his friend back. Not that Oboro really left, he wasn't usually more than ten feet away, but he'd missed the proximity he'd come to know.

Besides, he's not sure Oboro will even so much as *touch* him until the heated jacket Hizashi had scoured the internet for arrives. Not that Izuku is complaining, he doesn't want to die by ghost Quirk overuse. For now he'll stick to wearing his selection of sweaters.

The school week that passes by is uneventful. They don't do much Quirk work, and when they do, Shota keeps Izuku on a tight leash

when using One for All and watches him carefully for signs of lowered core temperature or early signs of hypothermia.

The green-haired teen hopes that by the time his new Hero costume is ready, Power Loader had requested until Wednesday the following week after they'd talked on Monday, Shota will loosen up a bit. The teen gets the protectiveness— he had almost died, but he can't learn with Shota hovering.

He'll just have to wait and see if the upgraded costume makes any difference in how Shota has been teaching as of late after Izuku has it. Hopefully it'll mellow Shota out when he's not in constant fear of Izuku kneeling over to hypothermia.

Izuku has to bite his tongue to keep from telling his homeroom teacher that he won't freeze to death now—not with Oboro refusing to even step in his general area, and the radio silence from the vestiges.

And Todoroki had been working more with his fire side in an attempt to get it up to par with his control of his ice side. He's made bounds and leaps with his progress, and Izuku is so happy for him. He's glad Todoroki is honing his skills, *his* Quirk.

That said, there's literally nothing to drop Izuku's temperature around, but if he tells Shota that, it might raise more questions Izuku doesn't want to answer. He can't have someone like Shota looking in too closely at him, he's not sure what he'd do if his guardians found out about his Quirk. If they... if they took off like his mother.

Izuku slumps more into the couch.

He's got Nemo pressed against his thigh, not purring but clearly happy. She's got her feet tucked under her like a little loaf of bread, and behind Izuku, tucked in the throw blanket that Izuku had spent the majority of his medical leave under, is Blanket. He doesn't tend to purr, but he does do a lot of talking—chuffs and meows and clicking noises. Right now, though, he's sleeping soundly, making that cute tired cat noise whenever the blanket shifts and disturbs him.

There's a tea on the coffee table, but it's probably cooled off by now. He'd really just wanted something to do to distract himself, and making tea had seemed distracting. But now he has tea that he doesn't really want to drink, but he'd feel far too bad about wasting it. Maybe he can just add some ice to it later and make iced green tea.

It's Sunday.

Sundays were fairly routine. Shota would get dressed—sometimes in his Hero costume, and sometimes in civilian clothes with his capture weapon coiled around his neck. He leaves for most of the morning, usually, and isn't home until after lunch time. He does the same thing after school on Thursday, where he returns just before dinner, sometimes even after dinner, much to Hizashi's dramatic dismay.

Thursday is one of the days that Izuku finds his own way back to his guardian's apartment. Hizashi usually takes the car to the radio station for prep for his show the following evening, and with Shota off doing whatever it is he does, Izuku gets an hour or so alone in the apartment —after travel time, at least.

Izuku's never asked about where Shota goes, and he's got no right to do that anyways. It's not his business. And if Shota's never told him, he probably doesn't want Izuku to know, right?

Sundays were routine, but today was a bit different.

Hizashi, who usually hangs around with Izuku all day, had been called away to the Radio station to cover for one of his co-workers who'd caught a cold and lost their voice. He'd left the apartment after making sure Izuku was fine with him going, fine to be alone— to which Izuku nodded his encouragement, and promised he'd be fine.

He didn't mind being left alone; he just wasn't usually alone. Shota and Hizashi had near mirrored schedules outside of school hours—one patrolled in the morning, and the other at night. That means that someone was usually home with him, whether awake, or asleep. Not that he was ever really alone with Oboro around.

Izuku enjoys the silence of the living room. He could turn the tv on, but he likes to have a moment to himself to just think.

He doesn't really think of anything specific, just what comes to mind. His thoughts drift, hardly focusing on one thing for too long at a time.

He's broken out of his thoughts by the door unlocking.

He doesn't need to worry; robbers don't have keys. Izuku doesn't think anyone besides himself, Shota and Hizashi have keys to the apartment. Maybe Nemuri or Iida Tensei too, but Izuku doesn't know. Izuku cranes his neck to look back at the door as if finally click open.

"I told you not to do it," Shota's voice carries in from the hall, and Izuku hears him kicking off his boots. The green-haired boy cocks an

eyebrow, opening his mouth to greet the man until he hears a second set of shoes hitting the floor. His jaw snaps shut.

“Yeah, well, you tell me not to do a lot of stuff.” A voice, younger and familiar echoes through the air. “It seemed pretty harmless, how was I supposed to know the scarf would unhook? It hates me; I think it did it on purpose.”

“Common sense?” Shota deadpans, voice annoyed and huffy. “A capture weapon doesn’t have feelings, so, no, it doesn’t hate you. You just can’t control it for shit. Hope you learned your lesson— I’m usually right, don’t forget it next time.”

There’s an exasperated ‘hey!’ thrown out in annoyance, but following it, silence settles.

There’s a pause, shuffling footsteps getting closer, and now Izuku has stayed still and quiet too long to be able to flee to his bedroom. Shota’s rounds the corner, looking back at whomever he’d brought back with him with a raised eyebrow. He doesn’t seem to notice the green-haired boy frozen stiff on the couch just yet, “you know, *I’m* going to get blamed for this, right? Your mother said no to the capture weapon, and I pushed for it. Now I’m sending you home broken, and it’s my ass on the line. She’s going to throttle me.”

“It’s not my fault you’re afraid of my mom.” There’s a humored snort, followed by a light huff of annoyance from Shota. It edges towards fond, and Izuku is beyond curious who his guardian is talking to.

The voice continues, twinged with dissatisfaction, “and, besides, I don’t know how she expects me to be a hero when I can’t even—” the voice cuts off abruptly. One set of footsteps stops suddenly, but the other keeps going, Shota disappears into the kitchen without a glance into the living room. “Sho?”

“What?” comes the stiff reply from the kitchen. Izuku hears the freezer open, and has half a mind to turn his head and lean so he can see into the kitchen, but he remains frozen in place, silently hoping that he’ll just blend in with the cats and furniture.

“There’s someone on your couch.”

“Yes, I’m aware.” Shota’s steps start up again, in no way any faster than before. He peers around the doorframe, catching Izuku’s wide gaze. The man blinks, angles his head slight to the left before huffing out a sigh, “Problem Child,” Shota says in way of greeting, head

angling forwards faintly along with the words before he's looking back towards the other person.

"You," Shota narrows his eyes in challenge, pointing halfheartedly to the armchair at his side, "sit."

The other teen hesitates for a second where he'd standing before following orders swiftly.

Izuku sucks in a breath when he finally sees who it is.

It's Shinsou.

Of course, it's the kid who hates him—the kid he'd probably almost gotten disqualified from the Sports Festival due to Oboro's unwarranted help. Of course, it's the kid who'd shot down all of Izuku's vain attempts at friendship following their first meeting, and the one who thinks Izuku is nothing but a—well, not to be rude, but nothing but a *Kacchan*. A stuck up, powerful-Quirked asshole who's been handed everything just for being born powerful.

He's *not*, it's, quite frankly, the furthest thing from the truth, but Shinsou thinks that; he'd said so himself, and Izuku hadn't been able to find the words to defend himself or correct Shinsou, not that he thought he would've even been believed if he tried.

Izuku is kicking himself for not being able to place the voice sooner—for not disappearing into his room as soon as he heard Shota with someone else.

"Midoriya...?" Shinsou seems just as surprised as Izuku feels by the revelation. He lingers by the chair, and only sits when Shota gives his shoulder a tipping push before crouching in front of him.

"H-hi, Shinsou..." Izuku gives an awkward wave, trying to ignore the way Shota snorts out what can only be a humored exhale. He doesn't know what to say, or do in this situation. A student is here. A student is seeing him here, sitting in his homeroom teacher and English teacher's apartment.

Shinsou stares hard at Izuku for a second before finally turning his accusing eyes at Shota, "why is Midoriya in your apartment?"

Izuku thinks he could turn the question around on Shinsou, but he'd like to keep the peace. There's obviously some sort of relationship here that he doesn't know about—why else would Shinsou be here,

completely comfortable in his guardian's apartment and being *snarky* and demanding with Shota?

Izuku feels out of his depth as he shrinks back further into the couch, hoping it'll just have mercy on him and put him out of his misery; swallow him whole. It doesn't. Pity.

Shota is undeterred by the tone of the purple-haired teen's voice. He lulls his attention back at Izuku for a second, observing him silently before looking back at Shinsou. He gently grabs the teen's forearm and pulls the appendage away from where it had been curled against his chest.

It's then that Izuku sees the swell of his wrist—a sprain if he's not mistaken.

Shota lets out a quiet breath as he glances over the sprain, not even looking up as he speaks, "Izuku lives here, so I would hope he was in the apartment, or I would've been upset at the lack of text explaining his whereabouts. Some of the children in my life tend to listen to me —" a narrowed glance thrown back at Izuku, followed by a heavy sigh as his attention drifts back to Shinsou's wrist, "—*occasionally*."

And wow, firstly, *ouch*. Called out, much? Is his face on fire, or is it just hot in here? Izuku resists the urge to hide his face in his hands. And, secondly, *damn*. That could've been eased into a little more; Izuku knew Shota was blunt, but that was maybe a bit too blunt, even for Shota.

Shinsou, jerks his chin up in surprise, eyes locking on Izuku, who shrinks down even more into the couch. Shinsou opens his mouth, chest heaving like he's ready to *talk*, but before the purple-haired teenager can mutter a word, he lets out a sharp hiss as Shota prods at his wrist. He doesn't press at it for long; the next second Shota is pressing an icepack Izuku just now notices against Shinsou's wrist.

It's then that Shinsou seems to forget the pain and refocuses on his words, "he— you— wait, *what*?"

"It's just a sprain, Kid, looks like I get to live to see another day." Shota tells the purple-haired teen, voice laced with humor, "and Izuku is staying with us for the unforeseeable future."

Something warm settled in Izuku's chest when Shota says that. He doesn't know why—that doesn't mean forever, but there's something about it that just... it's nice to hear.

“He lives here now?” Shinsou repeats, baffled, “why?”

“I don’t think that’s any of your business, Hitoshi.” Shota shakes his head, “you kids pry too much. You, and 1-A both.”

Shinsou sputters in offence, glaring at Shota. It’s a heated glare, one that would’ve been sent directly to punishment suicide sprints had it been from anyone in 1-A. Shota seems to just brush it off now though. He pushes himself up to stand, leaving the two teens to silently stare at each other in his absence.

Moments later, Shota returns with the first aid kit. He riffles through it before pulling out an elastic compression bandage, turning back to Shinsou and holding his hand out for the teen to set his own injured one into it. Shinsou does, but not after wrinkling his nose and letting out a huff.

Izuku stays completely still, and quiet to the point he’s not sure he’s even breathing as Shota works. Shinsou watches him with narrowed interest, likely learning how to redo the bandaging.

When Shota is finished, he leans away to survey over his work before looking up at Shinsou in question, “not too tight?”

“No,” the purple-haired boy wiggles his fingers and tests the give to the bandaging, “it’s fine. Thanks.”

Shota lets out a hum, prodding at Shinsou’s fingertips. He’s probably looking for loss of circulation, though it looks like it’s wrapped well. Izuku can only wonder how many times Shota himself had had to wrap a sprain, or even just how many times he’d *had* sprains.

“I still don’t understand why Midoriya is here.”

Seeming satisfied with Shinsou’s circulation, Shota lifts his gaze up to the lavender eyes, “well it’s a good thing you don’t *need* to understand then, isn’t it?”

“That’s not fair,” Shinsou’s eyebrows draw together, “how long has he been here? Why is he here? Why *here*, specifically? You don't bring home students. Ever. So, why is he here with you and ‘zashi? ...is this why you’ve been so busy? You can’t just—you can’t bring home a-a kid and not tell anyone! Not tell *me*! W-why didn’t you tell me?”

“Oh?” Shota drawls sarcastically, patting Shinsou’s knee just a bit harder than probably needed before using it as support when he

pushes himself back up onto his feet. His arms cross over his chest. “I was unaware my husband and I needed to run our decisions through you first, nephew. And I already told you, it’s really none of your concern what goes on with me, Hizashi, or Izuku, Kid.”

“Does mom know?”

“Yes, Hitoshi, my sister is aware.” Shota sighs, rubbing at his eyes with his thumb and index finger. “Not that it matters, it’s not her concern either. I just needed her to sign some documents.”

“What documents?” Shinsou butts in, his own arms lacing over his chest. He awkwardly presses the icepack on his wrapped wrist, glaring up at Shota.

“The same ones ‘zashi and I signed in case of an emergency for you.”

“My mom is Midoriya’s God parent?”

“No. *My* sister is Midoriya’s secondary emergency contact after Hizashi and I. The fact that she’s also your mother is unrelated, Kid.” Shota replies easily. “As is one of Hizashi’s brothers.”

And isn’t that news to Izuku. When had they done this?

“Sorry, Problem Child,” Shota finally looks back at him. Izuku would’ve thought Shota forgot he was even in the room, but he knows Shota is too perceptive for that. “We were going to tell you later, when you could meet them. Since we’re both Pro Heroes, there needs to be a safe place for you to go if there’s ever an emergency and we’re unavailable. It was a requirement from your social worker.”

Izuku’s not quite sure what to say, but he doesn’t need to worry about it, because Shinsou keeps talking anyways, “wait, so, this is legit?” Shinsou asks, suddenly sounding winded. “Like, legit *legit*? A social worker, emergency contacts. Why... why’d you keep this a secret?”

“We didn’t,” Shota shakes his head, “you just didn’t ask.”

“I didn’t *ask*?” Shinsou’s glare sharpens, “I didn’t think I’d need to ask! *‘Hey, uncle Sho, adopt any kids recently?’* Who needs to ask that! How long is he staying here?”

“It’s not my fault you don’t come around—if it was a secret I didn’t want you to be a part of, I wouldn’t have brought you back to the apartment knowing Izuku was home. He’ll be staying for as long as

the government permits," Shota responds casually. He pauses to study the purple-haired teen, eyebrows furrowing, "why are you so upset? This literally doesn't affect you in the slightest, Kid. You didn't even *know* until now."

"That's my point! You adopted Midoriya!" Shinsou gestures to Izuku, who shifts awkwardly. A big part of him wants to leave—he'd just been minding his own business and now he's stuck somewhere he doesn't want to be, but the bigger part of him doesn't want to draw any attention to himself.

"What's the problem with that?" Shota edges, arms crossing over his chest, "you'd better tread real carefully here, Hitoshi. I get you might be upset you lost to him in the festival, but that's no right to act like this."

Shinsou deflates a little, shooting Izuku a thoughtful scowl. Izuku just swallows, lacing his hands together in his lap. Despite the annoyed looks he's sending, Izuku can't help but feel a little bad—he himself had been bewildered at the kindness from Shota and Hizashi when they'd offered him a place in their home. He can only imagine how surprising it must be to find out like this. To have it dropped on you suddenly.

"How long has he been living with you? Why—*why* is he living with you?"

For a second, Shota just stares at Shinsou, then he looks back at Izuku where his expression softens before hardening as he looks back at Shinsou, "Izuku has been living with us since a couple weeks after the USJ incident. And, as I already said, Izuku's personal situation is of none of your concern."

"That—that—it's been *weeks*, uncle Sho, Midoriya's been here for almost a *month*, and you didn't tell anyone?" Shinsou sputters, gaze locked on his uncle, "you've been completely normal— nothing's changed, yet—yet something *did*—you have a kid!"

"Everyone who needs to know, does," Shota give a one shouldered shrug, finally stepping away from Shinsou and plopping on the couch beside Izuku. The green-haired teen actually lets out a snort as Shota tugs the blanket behind him, cat and all, down over Izuku, before scooping Nemo up into his arms. The little brat purrs loudly. "Take a breath, Hitoshi. I can't send you home with a sprain and a panic attack."

Shinsou does suck in a breath, glare not lessening in the slightest, “I can’t believe this.”

“Yeah, well,” Shota hides his face in Nemo’s soft coat, mumbling his next words against the purring cat, “believe it. I love you, Kid, but you don’t get any say in my personal affairs. I’m sorry you’re upset. I wish I had all the answers for you, ‘toshi, but I don’t. None that I’m willing to give.”

There’s a pause where no one speaks. Shota has his eyes closed, and Shinsou is glaring at the wall across from him, squeezing the icepack circling his wrist too tight to be comfortable. Izuku’s own wrist twinges with phantom pain.

Izuku fiddles with his own fingers under the blanket, only to be startled when Blanket’s cold nose bumps against his hand. The tension is suffocating. Izuku’s not sure how to diffuse the situation— “I, um, I didn’t know you and Shinsou were related.”

Shota’s eyes sliver open, and his gaze flicks to Izuku.

“Guess he keeps secrets from you too then,” Shinsou snaps, and Izuku folds in on himself even more.

Shota blows out a very tired sigh, staring up at the ceiling for a second before his gaze drops slowly to the teen in the armchair, “Hitoshi—”

“I’m sorry,” Izuku bows his head, wincing lightly at cutting his guardian off, “I didn’t mean to upset you, Shinsou. I-I really didn’t know you were a-a part of Shota— Sen-um-*Sensei*’s life... I know you don’t... you don’t *w-want* to be friends, and I get it. I do! Trust me, I do. But... but please don’t be upset with your uncle. He—he and, um, he and Hizashi were just helping me out, and I... I owe them a lot—”

“Izuku, you don’t—”

The teen wrestles his way out of the blanket, sending silent apologies to Blanket the cat who ends up tangled in it, not that the cat is complaining in the slightest. Izuku offers Shinsou a bow, internally wincing at how awkward he feels. “This is family s-stuff, I shouldn’t be here.” Izuku forces himself up, only to bow slightly in Shota’s direction as well. “I’m sorry for causing trouble between you.”

Izuku takes the stunned second of silence to make his escape. His feet carrying him away before he’s even properly stood up straight again.

“Izuku—”

He hears Shota’s call of his name, but he’s fleeing the room to quickly to even think about turning and answering. He steps into his room, easing his door shut behind him so it doesn’t make so much as a sound. The click of the door shutting is so faint even Izuku doesn’t hear it.

“Oh hey, you’re back,” Oboro greets, gaze barely lifting from where it’s fixed on his laptop screen.

There’s a movie playing on Izuku’s laptop—an older movie that had come out just after Oboro had died, Izuku assumes. It’s not the kind of thing Shota or Hizashi would want to watch, but Oboro had begged to use Izuku’s laptop to watch it. He doesn’t very often deny the ghost things, especially when he flashes those ghost puppy-eyes.

It’s not really the sorta stuff Izuku was interested in either, which was why he was in the living room with his tea instead of having a movie day with the ghost like usual. He probably should’ve just stuck it out in here.

“Y-yeah,” Izuku breathes out, slumping back against the door. He doesn’t hear footsteps chasing him, but he does faintly hear Shota’s voice. He sounds annoyed, and Izuku can only pray it’s not at him.

“Hey...” Oboro straightens up sharply, inching to the edge of the bed as he eyes Izuku up and down, “wait, you okay?”

Izuku is a little surprised Oboro hadn’t heard any of the conversation, but then again, he can’t hear any talking from the living room either now. Izuku reaches up to rub at the back of his neck, shaking his head as he responds, “y-yeah, I’m... I’m good. I’m... fine.”

“Doesn’t sound it,” the ghost frowns, “seriously, what’s up? What happened?”

“I didn’t know Shota... um, that Shota has a nephew.”

“Hitoshi?” Oboro cocks his head to the side, “yeah, you met him at the —oh.”

Izuku lets out a humorless laugh, dragging his fingers through his hair as he finally pushes off of the door, instead pacing quick lines around the room, “he hates me, I think. He... he’s upset that I’m here, and I don’t know how to fix it. I don’t—”

“Hey, hey,” Oboro’s voice drops in that way your voice does when you’re talking to a scared or injured animal. “Take a second, yeah? You still gotta breathe, Izu, and I gotta tell ya, you *aren’t* right now. So just, uh, just do that.”

Izuku tried to suck in a couple breaths, but it’s hard.

“Wow, okay, you really need to calm down, Izu, c’mon. It’s okay—” Izuku feels arms wrapping around him in a hug, and the only thought that crosses his mind is to latch on. He clutches desperately at Oboro, hands grabbing fistfuls of icy cold, yet surprisingly soft, Yuuei blazer. “Shh, it’s alright. It doesn’t matter what Hitoshi thinks, yeah?”

“It *does*,” Izuku’s nose is pressed against Oboro’s shoulder, finally starting to catch his breath. It’s a weird feeling—despite the fact Oboro is solid in his arms, he has no trouble breathing even with his mouth and nose shoved into the ghost’s shoulder, “it does matter. He’s Shota’s family, I don’t—I *can’t* wreck that. I can’t wreck another family, Oboro— I already broke mine; I won’t do that to someone else’s...”

It takes a second for Izuku to realize that he’s even hugging Oboro, and when he does, he snorts a tired laugh where his face is pressed into grey fabric, “I thought you weren’t going to touch me until after I got that heated jacket?”

Oboro sputters, “I-I—well—okay. Okay, well, to be fair, this is the only thing I could think of to get you to calm down. Breathing is a vital part of the whole *alive* thing, and unfortunately, you can’t just *stop*, unless you want the repercussions of that, and I ten-outta-ten *don’t* recommend. I didn’t even think about it, I just reacted... you’re okay, right? Not... not too cold?”

“I’m fine,” Izuku assures, grinning into Oboro’s shoulder, “I told you so.”

“Yeah, yeah,” the ghost snorts, pulling away and holding Izuku at arm’s length by his shoulders so he can eye his face, “you did. You were right, I was wrong. *But* I still don’t trust that vestige guy. He could’a been trying to kill you. Trying to tempt you into a ghost-hug-disguised-hypothermia death.”

“First was nice,” Izuku defends with a playful pout, “he helped me understand what happened, I doubt he’d try to kill me now. Besides, you haven’t even met him— you can’t dislike a guy you’ve never met.”

“I can, and I will,” Oboro finally pulls away, chest puffing out as he does so. “That guy wouldn’t stand a chance against me. I’ll fight him for number one ghost privilege. Sure, maybe he’s attached to you, or whatever, but you met me first!”

“You’re gonna fight the two-hundred-year-old vestige who is the first wielder of quite possibly one of the most powerful Quirks to date?” Izuku makes sure the disbelieving curl in his tone is evident, one eyebrow arching in an almost challenging sort of way.

“If that’s what it takes!” Oboro chirps, shooting Izuku a playful grin.

“You’re ridiculous,” the teen huffs out, lips tilting upwards in a light smile, “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you’re already my number one ghost. Not that your ego needs anymore praise.”

“Probably not,” Oboro agrees, eyes wide with mirth.

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but a knock on his door has him snapping his jaw closed, and jumping away from the ghost even though they weren’t even touching any more. He waits for Shota’s voice to comes through the door, but after a long second where he hears nothing, Izuku clears his throat, “c-come in?”

He hadn’t heard the front door open, or close, but he assumes Shinsou must’ve left if Shota was coming to talk to him. He’s completely wrong, he notes, when the door wedges open and purple eyes peek in at him.

“S-sh-shinsou!” Izuku jolts up, “I um, I thought you were—I mean, I just—”

“You thought I was Shota?” the other teen fills in, opening the door a little bit more, but making no move to pass the threshold. “Understandable.”

Izuku hesitates for a second before nodding slowly. “Sorry.”

Shinsou’s nose wrinkles slightly at the apology, but he doesn’t say anything.

The silence drags on.

“What, um, what are you doing here?” Izuku breaks the uncomfortable silence the two are left in. He shuffles awkwardly, wringing his hands together. “N-not that I mind! I just, well, you don’t

r-really like me, so I can't imagine why you'd, y'know, be... *here*? A-at my—um, at the guest room, I mean."

"I came to apologize."

Ah. So Shota sent him then?

"Uncle Sho didn't send me, if that's what you're thinking," Shinsou shakes his head, arms crossing loosely over his chest. He digs the toes of his left foot into the floor, and if Izuku didn't know any better, he might think Shinsou was *nervous*. The purple haired teen averts his gaze, glaring down at the floor. "I doubt he even would've let me come back if I asked. He's kinda mad at me now. Mad enough that he... he's calling my parents to come get me, told me not to move while he was on the phone... but, here I am?"

"He's going to be upset," Izuku breathes out.

"Probably," Shinsou agrees without hesitation. "It's not like it's the first time I've upset him. I've got a track record. He's used to me and all the dumb shit I do."

As if to add imagery to the words, Shinsou holds out his wrapped wrist.

Izuku frowns at the injury before lifting his eyes up to Shinsou's face, "that's not true, I don't think you planned to get hurt. It was an accident, right? He's probably just upset you *got* hurt, not that you hurt yourself."

Shinsou narrows his eyes, mouth pressed in a bewildered expression. He's watching Izuku like he doesn't believe the other teen really exists. He stares long enough that Izuku finds himself shifting under the other boy's narrowed gaze.

"You really are just genuinely nice," Shinsou mutters, and Izuku thinks it might be more to himself than to the other person in the room. Izuku furrows his brow, the 'what?' he wants to ask dying on his lips as Shinsou continues, "I thought you were being condescending after you won; when you were being so nice. People *aren't* nice—especially after I use my Quirk on them."

Izuku's mouth forms an 'o' shape before he lets a frown curl onto his lips, "I wasn't trying to be condescending."

Shinsou turns his head to glare at the door frame, looking like he's

biting the inside of his cheek, “yeah, I know.” A pause. “I get that now.”

Shinsou watches Izuku like he’s seeing him in a whole new light. It’s weird being under observation, but he makes no move to leave, or say anything. He just let’s his peer study him thoughtfully.

There’s another, slightly longer, pause, before Shinsou lets out a heavy sigh. He rubs at his eyes, then looks Izuku in the eyes for the first time since their battle at the Festival, “I’m sorry, Midoriya. I was an asshole —then and today. I let my loss get the better of me, and I judged you based on what I believed you were, instead of what you are. I made assumptions about you because your Quirk and... and your whole class.”

Izuku opens his mouth, but closes it just a second later. That process repeats maybe twice—and he’s sure he looks like a gaping fish throughout it. He just can’t seem to find any words. None that seem appropriate for this.

“Mostly though,” Shinsou continues, picking at the wrapping on his wrist, gaze dropped to stare down at it, “I’m sorry for taking my frustrations out on you today. It was mean. I’m not mad at you, I’m... I’m mad at my uncle. He always does this; keeps people in the dark. I was surprised, and I had no right to have asked for—no, *demanded*— answers. Shota was right, it wasn’t my business, but I insisted like an asshole. So... I’m sorry.”

“You were surprised,” Izuku bows his head, “I get it—”

“I was wrong,” Shinsou huffs, irritation in his voice. “I was a jerk, and you didn’t do anything wrong to deserve it. I get you have the whole nice guy thing going, but... don’t defend me, okay? I know I was an ass. My uncle *told* me I was an ass. As soon as you left the room, I realized I fucked up. I just don’t...” Shinsou lets out a groan of irritation that Izuku thinks might be directed at himself, dragging his palms down his face. “Look, I don’t hate you, okay? And I hope you don’t hate me either. We’re practically cousins now, right? So... can you just... I don’t know, take the apology? Maybe?”

“Okay,” Izuku swallows, “I forgive you. It’s alright.”

“You forgive too easily,” Oboro scoffs from the desk, making his presence known once again. Izuku’s gaze darts over quickly before refocusing on Shinsou. “First that blockhead of a childhood friend you’ve got, and now ‘toshi, who from what I’ve gathered, has been a

dick to you—I mean the last time Sho used the *'stay'* command on the kid, 'toshi was *seven*."

Izuku wants to shush the ghost.

...

He also really wants to know what seven-year-old Shinsou did to warrant a 'stay' command.

He doesn't linger on the thought for long, as Shinsou's words crash over him like a tsunami. Izuku's attention jolts back up to the boy still stood in his doorway, eyes saucer-wide, "c-cousins...?"

"Um, yeah?" the purple-haired teen drawls, blinking owlishly at Izuku, "that's typically the word used to describe the relation between two sibling's kids? My mom and uncle Sho are siblings, and you're Sho's kid now, so..."

"They're just fostering me!" Izuku yelps, eyes wide, "they're just looking after me, I mean, they don't... I doubt they'd want to make it more *permanent*—it's just, just the easiest thing. The easiest place for me to be with, um, with everything and, I mean, Shota's my homeroom teacher, so I-I trust him, and Hizashi is, he's great! I like it here, and they're very n-nice and kind, but—"

"So, you don't wanna be cousins then?"

"No!" Izuku blurts, waving his hands out in front of him. His waving gets more frantic when he realizes what he'd said, rushing to correct himself, "I mean, yes! I do! Really! I just meant, it's not, like, official. I really, really would like to, um, to be your cousin. I've never," Izuku swallows, rubbing the back of his neck, "I've never had one before."

"Good," Shinsou eyes him, "neither have I."

Izuku stills, "you haven't?"

"No," the purple-haired teen shakes his head. "My dad's an only child, and mom's just got uncle Sho—and y'know, the whole gay thing. Married to a man and all. No accidental babies coming his way, right?" A pause, where Shinsou's smile widens into an almost smirk, "well, besides you, I suppose."

"Did you just call me an accident?" Izuku can't help the laugh of surprise.

Shinsou lets out a laugh as well, clearly amused with the reaction. He doesn't deny or confirm it, but Izuku hears the tease for what it is. Friendly. This is a different Shinsou to the one he'd seen in the living room, and the one who he'd fought tooth and nail at during the Sports Festival.

"You really don't... mind? That it's, I mean, t-that I, um, that *I'm* the one here?"

"Look," Shinsou blows out a breath, ruffling his finger through his own hair, "it's not you, alright? It's nothing personal. I just... Uncle Sho was the only thing that I had, that you perfect 1-A kids didn't. I mean, I know he teaches you guys, but he was mine— always has been. My uncle. He's always been the one I looked up to, y'know? He's cool. But he's also an ass."

"So you felt... threatened? By... by me?"

Shinsou hesitates, eyes narrowing and eyebrows furrowing before he sighs, slumping against the doorframe like he's suddenly exhausted, "...yeah. I guess. Maybe a bit. I lashed out, but it wasn't because it was you, not really. I was more upset with uncle Sho. He's always been blunt, but *wow*—way to ease a guy into it."

"Yeah," Izuku gives a nod, voice dropping to an almost sympathetic whisper, "I thought he would've eased into it a little too. I really am sorry this was sprung on you, but they were just keeping it quiet because I, well, because I asked them to... it's, well, I-I—"

"You don't have to explain yourself to me," Shinsou shakes his head, "it was uncool of me to even ask. Your shit is your shit, and just because you're staying with my uncle doesn't give me any right to know. It's not even really about you—I mean, it was, but in a different way—I just get so pissed off when he does stuff like this— he's *always* been like this. Don't apologize for my uncle's lack of social grace.

"I mean we didn't even know he was even dating 'zashi until they moved in together. Probably wouldn't have even known he got married if it weren't for Hizashi insisting on a wedding, and even then, we only found out when the invitation arrived in the mail," Shinsou shakes his head, dragging his fingers up through wild hair.

There's a pause.

Izuku doesn't know what to say—there's nothing he can say. Shota *is* a private person—he'd only known the raven-haired man since the start

of the school year, but he and the entirety of 1-A have all come to the same conclusion. He doesn't necessarily keep secrets, but he also doesn't outright tell people things either unless there's relevance to something else.

Oboro lets out a sigh, and Izuku turns briefly to look back at him, "the kiddo's got a point. Sho is pretty closed off sometimes. He loves his family, don't get me wrong, but he's never been *super* close with anyone... Not until Hizashi and I got our hands on him, at least. He likes to keep people at arm's length."

Izuku wants to question more—ask from someone who'd known Shota for as long as he and Shinsou have been alive without asking the source or the source's husband, but he also doesn't want to pry into something that's not his business. Nor does he want to talk to a ghost in front of a peer.

"He's just... never felt like he needs to tell people stuff, even when people want to know things. He's so private and withdrawn, but... I'm used to it." Shinsou glares at the wall, a genuine frown on his lips, "y'know, I learn more about my uncle from 'zashi than I do from him. Sad, right?"

Izuku opens his mouth, but it promptly clicks shut again. He has nothing to respond with.

Shinsou seems to notice this, because he gives a sly, nervous half-smile, "drives my mom absolutely nuts."

Izuku lets out a surprised laugh, letting the admission ease the tension.

He wants to defend Shota, a bit, but he doesn't want to do that to someone who's known the Pro their whole life. It would be insensitive. Besides, Shinsou has a right to feel how he feels, just as Shota has a right to keep his private life *private*, even if it's from close friends and family.

Izuku realizes then, as his own laughs die down, that Shinsou is still lingering in his doorframe. Shinsou doesn't look put out by it in the slightest, has made no move to enter the room, but it feels rude to leave him out in the hallway, especially now that they're *talking*.

"Did you want to sit down?" Izuku asks offers cautiously. He gestures to the bed, then digs his hands in his sweatshirt pocket before he can start anxiously playing with his fingers.

Shinsou seems surprised; peering further into the room and eyeing the proffered bed before taking a tiny step in. He pauses, unsure, almost like he's waiting for Izuku to changes his mind.

He doesn't.

The taller teen clears his throat, "yeah... okay. Just until uncle Sho realizes I'm gone and drags me away." The purple-haired teen takes small steps into the room before perching on the edge of the bed. "I like your room. All Might fan?"

Izuku sputters, before smiling sheepishly. He looks back at the lone poster of the Pro, before glancing over at a duo set of All Might figurines on his desk. One of the figurines is sitting at Oboro's hip, while the other, the ghost is sitting in. They were his two favorites. One of him in his Silver Age costume, and the other of his most popular and long-standing costume. It's the same one Izuku had had in onesie form when he was little.

It's really the only decoration he has, not wanting to overdo it despite Hizashi encouraging Izuku make the space his own. He'd decided in the end to just have his favorite All Might collectibles in the room.

"A little," Izuku admits, ignoring the way his cheeks heat up as Oboro cackles to the point he's rubbing at watery eyes. Oboro had seen Izuku's bedroom at his old apartment—Oboro knows exactly what's hidden away in the boxes in his closet.

Izuku look back to shoot a glare at the ghost, but it does little to stop Oboro's cackling. The ghost is hunched forwards, legs hanging off the edge of the desk and chest pressed against his knees. His laughs get breathier, but don't wane.

"What are you looking at?"

Izuku swirls around to face Shinsou, who's watching him with a cocked head. "What?"

Shinsou shifts from his seat on the edge of the bed, shrugging, "you were looking at something. And... well, I've never seen all the cats gather in one spot— but here they are, and they're looking where you were too. All of them."

"I—" Izuku's gaze drops to the cats, who he just now notices are all present. They must've sneaked in when Shinsou was standing in the doorway. Oboro's laughter stops abruptly, but Izuku refrains from

turning to look at him.

True to Shinsou's words, they're all staring at Oboro. Blanket is perched at the foot of the bed, watching Oboro intently, waiting for the ghost to wiggle his fingers and entice him over for play, and Fish is curled up on Izuku's pillow, gaze tracking the ghost's movements. Nemo, presence the most surprising, is curled up like a loaf of bed, glaring directly at Oboro. Her tail swishes in annoyance, and her ears are flattened back.

"I don't know," Izuku breathes out, panic seizing his heart, "maybe, um, maybe they saw a s-spider or something?"

"Don't tell Hizashi that," Shinsou warns with a frown, one eyebrow arching in disbelief. Izuku wants to ask *why* he shouldn't mention it to Hizashi, but Shinsou continues before he can figure out how to move his mouth again. "If *they're* looking at a spider or something, what were *you* looking at?"

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, heart hammering in his chest to the point he hears his blood rushing through his ears as he tries to think of an excuse—tries to think of anything to reply with—

"Hitoshi." The names comes out like a warning, and Izuku jumps, gaze jerking to Shota stood stiffly in the doorway. "Do you even listen to a word I say? What part of *stay* didn't you understand?"

"Sorry," Shinsou winces, bowing his head, "I came to apologize for my behavior."

Shota bristles, narrowing his eyes at the purple-haired teen. "Good." He finally allows, voice heavy with a sigh after watching Shinsou for a long second, "you should've. You were an ass. I'm not gonna tolerate behavior like that again in my home. Remember that."

"I know," Shinsou's head bows down further. "I really am sorry, uncle Sho."

Shota stares at his nephew for a second before looking at Izuku. There's a silent question underlying in his expression.

The green-haired teen straightens up when he notices, looking between Shinsou and Shota rapidly. His expression softens at Shinsou's genuine apologetic frown. "I forgive him," Izuku tells his guardian with a nod, "really, it was a misunderstanding. We, uh, we're fine now. Worked it out, r-right?"

Shinsou nods sharply and Shota, bless him, just masks a look of confusion behind a frown.

“Okay...” the dark-haired man looks between them suspiciously, like they’re up to something. “Well, your mother’s here, ‘toshi. Let’s go.”

“Already?” Shinsou frowns, looking at Izuku. “But you *just* called.”

Shota angles his head tiredly in Shinsou’s direction, “yes, but I texted her to inform her of your injury before we got home. Earlier, you know, before you decided to act like an obtrusive five-year-old. She was already on her way when I called.”

“I apologized for that.” Shinsou deflates after the words leave his mouth, glancing at Izuku, the desktop behind the other boy (Oboro cocks his head and watched the purple-haired boy with a frown), the cats, then back at Shota before finally inching off the bed with a sigh. “Fine.”

Shinsou gives Izuku a halfhearted wave before moving to walk past Shota, who doesn’t quite step out of the doorway, but leaves enough room for Shinsou to squeeze past. Shinsou huffs at his uncle’s antics, but rises to the challenge, tugging his arms in so he can squeeze in the gap.

“Hey, uh, Shinsou?” Izuku presses his lips together as the other boy freezes, turning back to glance at him. “Maybe um, w-would you like to sit with me at lunch tomorrow? I mean, I-I understand if not! It’s no big deal. B-but, uh, I know you probably don’t want to sit with my classmates, so we can sit just the two of us! I’ve never seen you in the cafeteria, I don’t think, but... I know a nice spot outside if it’s nice enough! Um, you really don’t have to, *please* don’t feel obligated—”

“Sure,” Shinsou cuts him off, smile widening a little before he seems to force it into a line of indifference. He shrugs uninterestedly, “if you want, I mean. Sounds... okay.”

“I do!” Izuku grins. He snaps his mouth shut at his own outburst, lowing his voice after clearing his throat as he continues, “so, I’ll, uh, I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

“Sounds like it,” Shinsou agrees.

Shinsou turns to leave shortly after, not waiting for anything else, and not saying anything more. Izuku hears his feet padding down the hallway. Izuku can’t help the giddy smile that splits across his face.

Progress. He'd made progress!

Shota lingers for a second, eyeing Izuku with a look crossed between amusement and disbelief. A small smile curls onto his lips as he shakes his head, "you're something else, Problem Child."

Shota disappears with Shinsou.

"Wow," Izuku swirls around to stare wide eyed in surprise at Oboro, "that was almost painful to watch."

"Hey," Izuku scoffs, dropping onto his bed so he can scratch Blanket between the ears. "I count that as win. He hated me before today and now he's agreed to have lunch with me! Win!"

Lunch the next day goes well. Well enough that Shinsou comes join him the next day too. And the day after. And the day after that as well. Izuku's not sure if the purple-haired teen had many friends in his classes; he'd seen clusters of Gen-Ed students in the cafeteria, but never Shinsou.

He doesn't know where the other had spent lunch hour before, but he's glad he decided to give Izuku a chance. They have a good time over the first couple days they eat together.

By Friday, Izuku has slowly integrated the quiet purple-haired teenager into his group of friends. Iida blinks in surprise at Shinsou the first time he manages to talk the other boy into lunch with them, but the Gen-Ed addition doesn't say anything. It takes a second for Izuku to remember that the two of them had probably met—he thinks back to Shota and Hizashi's wedding photos that he'd seen, where two boys mirroring Shinsou and Iida had been posed side by side.

Uraraka seems excited to have someone new to talk to, and Tsu is also equally curious. Todoroki accepts the newcomer easily enough, but not without cautious looks shot in his direction every so often.

It takes a bit for Shinsou to start relaxing a little— and he doesn't when there are others around, but Izuku wholeheartedly believes that soon he'll be able to call Shinsou a friend. Hopefully.

Thursday Shinsou comes back to the apartment with Shota after what Izuku realizes are Shinsou's own personal training sessions with the underground hero. Shinsou is learning to use a capture weapon like Shota, and it's so awesome!

Izuku leads the other boy into his room after Shota collapses on the couch in exhaustion. Hizashi snorts a laugh and waves them off before disappearing into the kitchen to start on dinner.

They don't do much more than hang out. They do some school work together—all the core classes are taught by the same teachers, and all first years get the same curriculum, just at different times of the day. Izuku and Shinsou work on their shared assignments together—the purple-haired boy is stronger in English than Izuku is, and in turn, Izuku can help Shinsou out with his Math.

It's nice studying with someone, and equally as nice to not have to bother Hizashi with his English questions, even though deep down Izuku knows the blonde doesn't mind helping him.

Sunday sees Izuku alone in his room.

Oboro is with him, reading another book. He's progressed from just being able to turn the pages with all his effort, to being able to grip the book covers. He holds them open, and turns pages, and to anyone else, it wouldn't be an accomplishment, but to the two of them, it's almost ground breaking.

It still takes concentration, and at times, when Oboro is too engrossed in the book, the object phases through his hands. Izuku knows when it happens without needing to look up—books falling to the floor thump, and there's usually warning to it because Oboro *groans*.

Izuku is on his bed scrolling through his phone. He's just watching videos on his phone, old videos of All Might, and some other Pro hero fights that come up in his recommended. He's really just waiting for Shinsou to come. It's still a bit early for his private lessons with Shota to be over.

Oboro is enjoying reading a book that he'd all but begged Izuku to check-out at the Yuuei library for him. He'd never heard of it, but Oboro had been thrilled.

Izuku glances up at the ghost who's immersed in the story. He's hunched over in the desk chair, elbows on his knees and the book hanging between his knees. His lips mouth along with the words he's reading. It's cute how excited to read again the ghost is. Cute, but sad.

Izuku doesn't have a second to react when there's a knock on his door, followed by the door opening. Shinsou steps into the room like he has been since they became friends, or, *sorta* friends, freezing abruptly and

staring at... at Oboro. No, not at Oboro. Oboro is a ghost. So that must mean Shinsou is staring at... at the *book*.

“What—”

The book hits the ground with a thud.

Izuku and Shinsou both jump at the sound. Izuku feels like he can’t catch his breath as his eyes lock on Shinsou. Shinsou’s gaze hasn’t strayed from the book on the floor.

Oboro’s attention jumps between the book and Shinsou before he’s staring wide-eyed at Izuku, “do... do you think he noticed?”

“What the *fuck*?”

He *definitely* noticed...

Chapter End Notes

So, Shinsou. Ngl, I love the Shinsou and Shota bond. I think it's so cute, but for this fic I needed a bond but at a distance; hence uncle & nephew. Also, I gave Shinsou good parents because he deserves it??

Would anyone be interested in a young erasermic & Oboro sorta fic? I have some ideas for backstory, but I don't know if I wanna commit to it. I love them, and I've been hinting at different things in this fic, so I could expand on the universe, but idk. Lemme know!

Also, big apologies if I butchered Shinsou's character. He's a bit demanding in the beginning, and I maybe wrote him as a brat? But it's mostly shock because Shota's blunt af. But yea, Izuku needs a friend and I like Shinsou. Hopefully I'll get better at his character the more I work with it!

Anyways, thanks for reading! Comments, as always, are greatly appreciated! Kudos are also great to see! :D

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Hello! Welcome to another chapter!

I had a lot of fun with this chapter. Don't mind me adding little things with the intent to make one specific person (and hopefully you guys) laugh. My goal here was to make my irl friend lose it, and I succeeded. Hopefully you guys find this chapter entertaining too!

The first bit takes place the day Izuku and Hitoshi meet-- it was supposed to be in the last chapter but I missed it? I write in Word Online and I apparently spaced chunks of plot around while editing briefly and lost them somehow? Oops? It'll be back on track with the current fic happenings fairly fast, you'll know when it's back to where the last chapter left off :))

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota will admit, as he's currently sprawled across the couch, that he probably could've handled the situations between his nephew and foster son a little better.

He hadn't thought anything wrong with it at first. It was logical to do things in order of importance, and what was important then was getting Hitoshi's wrist wrapped up and supported. Everything else came second to someone's physical wellbeing.

In hindsight, he probably should've expected that sort of reaction from his nephew.

Hitoshi is a wonderful kid, but he could also be an ass when he felt threatened or nervous. Hitoshi was a shy child—or, maybe shy wasn't quite the word. He was withdrawn. He didn't isolate himself from family, but he tended to prefer to be alone out in the world, or at school.

Shota himself didn't see a problem with it, but it was something that had always worried his sister and brother-in-law. Shota had gotten many a phone call from his sister over the years about Hitoshi isolating himself, or not having many friends. Of her worry for her

only child—after all, she'd watched how Shota had grown up from the sidelines, and he knows she'd always been worried about him as well.

And it made sense. As soon as you had a Quirk people deemed villainous, nothing else matters.

Hitoshi had only been three when he'd gotten his Quirk; when he'd asked his father for an All Might action figure at the shops, and despite being told no with his birthday fast approaching and presents already purchased and wrapped, had somehow managed to leave the store with a paid for All Might figure.

His control back then was awful, as is most kids who manifest in such situations. His father had snapped out of the control, or Hitoshi had released it outside the store, or whatever had happened, and instantly, the man had known it was a Quirk—*Hitoshi's* Quirk.

Shota had heard all about it over the phone after Hitoshi's first Quirk counselling visit. Mind-based Quirks were always tended to quickly, children referred to specialists who can help them control it fast. Wayward mind-based Quirks were always a problem.

Question based hypnosis was hard to control for an inquisitive child.

He had a lot of control accidents, where he's accidentally prompt his parents under it with innocent questions—he'd managed to get Hizashi more times than Shota can count, and he himself had fallen victim to it once or twice too, but the more it happened, the more Hitoshi noticed the signs of someone under his control, and he was always quick to let them go with frantic apologies when he did.

By the time he was almost five, he'd had a fair amount of control over it. He still slipped, as did a lot of children when they got upset or emotional, but it was a surprising amount of control for someone so young.

That didn't matter as soon as word got out around school.

Hitoshi, like many others with villainous Quirks, or even *without* Quirks, was bullied pretty heavily throughout his childhood. They tried to swap him to different schools, but word of his Quirk always got out and he was treated accordingly. He was taught by his peers that his Quirk was scary; that he was a villain waiting to happen, and not a lot that his parents or uncles could say changed it.

Shota hadn't thought there would be any tension between his Problem

Child and his nephew—they came from similar situations. Both had been bullied relentlessly—Hitoshi he knows for sure, and Izuku he's almost positive about.

The Quirkless were treated almost inhumanely in this day and age, and there's obvious signs of trauma buried in the green-haired child. If he'd only manifested his Quirk on the day of the Entrance Exam, he'd grown up Quirkless. Plus, there was the rivalry-not-rivalry that Izuku had with Bakugou that had always rubbed Shota the wrong way. There was more to that than Izuku was willing to share.

The point was, he'd thought the two boys would've understood each other, which is why he'd hardly even thought about bringing Hitoshi home with him to tend to the teen's wrist with high quality medical-grade equipment.

Sure, Hitoshi had been upset. More upset than Shota had thought, and then Izuku was... well, he's not quite sure. He'd never seen such submissiveness from their foster child, and it's then that Shota has a small inkling of regret pooling in his stomach.

It starts off bad, sure, but it ends with Hitoshi and Izuku setting up a lunch date the follow day at school. So, could it really have been that bad?

Yes, apparently so. Or, so he's been told.

"Hey, Sho, I'm home," Hizashi greets, and the dark-haired man barely stirs from where he's slumped along the couch. Hizashi walked into the room, huffs fondly and leans over the couch to press his hand on Shota's shoulder, giving it a quick rub before he's moving into the kitchen, "got held up a little, so I brough home burgers for dinner."

"Sounds good," Shota mumbles into the couch cushions, not yet wanting to get up.

"Is the green-bean in his room?" Hizashi inquires from the kitchen, "I wasn't too sure what to get him, so I grabbed a couple for him to pick from. Can't go wrong with leftovers, yeah?"

"Last time I checked," Shota replies with a sigh, finally pushing himself up. He stretches his back out and slowly steps into the kitchen, leaning against the doorway, "how was the station?"

"Same old," Hizashi shoots a bright smile over his shoulder at Shota, "Ogawa-san lost his voice, so I filled in for him. Not as much fun at

my show, but it was still good!"

"You only like your show so much because you get to be rowdy and play all your favorite music."

"I don't see any problem with that?" Hizashi gives a bright laugh, head lulling in Shota's direction as he unpacks the take-away bags, "so, how was training with 'toshi? Any luck with the capture weapon?"

"Unless you count him roping the ceiling beams, swinging across the room as if he was a poor imitation of *Tarzan*, then proceeding to throw himself into a wall when his capture weapon gives out mid-swing, before plummeting to the ground a *success*, then no."

"Ouch," Hizashi winces in sympathy, "he okay?"

"He's fine," Shota promises gruffly, "just a sprain. Brought him back here to fix him up before texting Yua to come get him. She was not impressed, if you can imagine."

Shota thinks back to only half an hour early when he'd guided Hitoshi down to the parking lot. Neither of them had spoken, just kept pace with each other as they moved.

Yua, Shota's sister, had been pulled up in front of the building. She'd given Shota a halfhearted glare before her eyes dropped to a bowed-headed Hitoshi, where she'd fretted over him, much to Hitoshi's embarrassment.

They'd gotten chewed out—the both of them.

Shota knew it was inevitable; so, he'd simply leaning against the open window and taken the lecture with a frown. She'd always be an older sister, and he'd always be treated like a little brother, no matter how old he got. He's not sure he'll ever be able to escape scoldings.

When she's done ranting about the obvious dislike for the capture weapon in her son's possession, the one that was currently tucked away in Shota's bag upstairs (Yua had refused for Hitoshi to keep it on his person until he knew how to control it better. She'd been hellbent on it after Hitoshi decided to try and learn more by himself, alone in his bedroom, only to end up hog-tied on the floor for hours until his father came home.), she demands to know how it happened.

Her next question was simple, tone curled with sharp annoyance,

“what on earth was Hitoshi doing *swinging* from the ceiling support beams anyway?”

And it’s a good question. A logical one.

Shota had called out a warning to the teenager, but it hadn’t been taken to heart. He’d been a teacher long enough that as soon as you tell a teenager, a child, that they can’t do something they think they can, they seem to make an effort to prove you wrong.

It really is unfortunate that most of the time, Shota, or the adult in question, is *right*.

Either way though, Shota had long ago adopted the mindset of *‘if you’re gonna be stupid, you’ve gotta be tough.’*, or, he’d adopted it for when whatever those little hell spawn were up to wasn’t dangerous or life threatening—he wasn’t above roping them in his capture weapon when something looked like it could *backfire* dangerously.

Little injures though, ones that the students *feel* for a bit and *learn* from, easily recoverable with time, or quick visits to Recovery Girl, were different. Like Izuku competing in the rest of the apprehension test on the first day with his broken fingers. Those were the things he was talking about. Like Hitoshi swinging across the ceiling childishly, showing off, only to fall and realize, *‘hey, that probably wasn’t very smart of me to use a potentially dangerous tool I hardly have an ounce of control over like that’*.

Which is exactly the answer he gives when his sister turns her questioning, slightly annoyed gaze onto him. Shota lifts his shoulders up in a shrug, angling his head, “he wanted to be an idiot, so I let him do it in a controlled environment. I told him not to do it.”

“Yeah,” Hitoshi huffs, not looking up, “he did.”

Yua lets out a huff, breathy and annoyed as she narrows her eyes at Hitoshi, “you need to listen you your uncle, ‘tosh. The only reason I’m even letting you *dabble* with that scarf is because he assured me that you'd be safe; that you’d need something like it if you wanted to make it into the Heroics Course and level with your peers.”

“I do need it!” Hitoshi swirls to look at her, face pinched in panic, “you *saw* the festival! I mean, Midoriya escaped my control— I need something that’ll put me on their level, and you’ve seen uncle Sho with his!”

“Relax, Hitoshi,” Yua snorts, “I’m not taking it away, even if it’s against my better judgment. You just need to be more careful with it. And listen to your teachers! Shota might not be your teacher yet, but if you do make it into 1-A, or even 1-B, you’ll have to treat him just as the others.”

“I look forward to making you run suicide sprints,” Shota adds with a slight uptick of the corner of his lips. He catches his sister’s gaze over the teenager, seeing her hiding a smile. “If Tenya and Izuku can respect me as a Sensei in a classroom setting, so can you, got it, Brat? Same goes for ‘zashi, but he’s not had any complaints about you yet. I just know you’ll be a nuisance for me though…”

Hitoshi scoffs, arms crossing over his chest where his sprain is in view. Shota can see his sister surveying over the injury that’s now in sight, lip worried between her teeth. When her gaze lifts to Shota, the man merely shakes his head at the silent question in her eyes.

It’s that maternal worry that is frequent in her gaze. She’d used to look at him the same way—even still *does* occasionally. Shota silently assures her it’s nothing but a sprain that’ll probably be healed up by their next training session on Thursday.

“Yeah, *Sensei*, I got it.” Hitoshi huffs, as Shota rolls his eyes and Yua lightly swats at Hitoshi’s arm in playful warning. Hitoshi gives a breathy laugh, his words obviously a sarcastic joke. Shota refrains from smiling, but his sister shoots him a teasing grin that cracks his deadpan expression. “Do you *really* make Midoriya do suicide sprints, uncle Sho?”

“When he deserves them,” Shota shrugs, finally straightening from his lean against the car. “And I’m sure you’ll end up in the same boat, you reckless brat.”

“Mom,” Hitoshi pouts, gaze turning to his mother, “uncle Sho’s calling me names again.”

“You *are* a reckless brat,” Yua huffs a laugh. She ruffles a sputtering Hitoshi’s hair, ignoring the betrayed expression.

“I see how it is,” Hitoshi drawls dramatically looking between his mother and uncle, “you two are in cahoots. My own mother, and my beloved uncle Sho. Plotting against me.”

“Us?” Shota raises an eyebrow, looking at his sister, the two of them sharing a deadpan look, “never.”

“Cahoots!” Hitoshi accuses dramatically.

“You so get your dramatic flair from your father,” Yua scoffs, expression softening as she eyes her child fondly. Hitoshi gives a good-natured laugh, smiling lightly as he looks between his mother and uncle.

“Anyways, thank you for patching up my reckless brat, Sho,” Yua bows her head thankfully, as Hitoshi slumps into the passenger’s seat. “And sorry I couldn’t meet your kid today, I’ve gotta drop ‘toshi off at home and get to an appointment.”

The dark-haired man gives a grunt in a reply, tucking his hands in his pockets, “I doubt Izuku is much in the mood for introductions anyways.”

Hitoshi winces guiltily at that, but says nothing.

Shota softens at the response, snaking a hand in through the window to ruffle through Hitoshi’s wild purple hair, “I kinda sprung it on him, anyways. He’ll probably need a second to wrap his head around it. You two should head off. Ice your wrist, ‘toshi. It’ll help with the swelling. Tell your mother if it hurts a lot, I’m sure it’s just a sprain, but if it gets worse, get it checked out.”

“Alright,” Hitoshi nods under Shota’s hand, before leaning up into the hand like a cat butting its head against the affection. A smile flickers on the man’s face before he presses his lips into a line. “Thanks, uncle Sho.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Shota brushes off, “I doubt I’ll see you at school tomorrow, but drop by if you’re planning to see Recovery Girl. She’ll give you less grief over it if the explanation's coming from me. And, if not, enjoy your lunch date with Izuku.”

“A lunch date?” Yua’s grin widens as Hitoshi groans, burying his face in his hands, “you have a lunch date? Awh, ‘tosh! I’m so proud of you, makin’ *friends*! I knew you could do it, baby!”

“*Thank you* for *that*, uncle Shota,” Hitoshi forces out through gritted teeth. He gives Shota a long-suffering look before turning towards his mother, cheeks faintly flushed at the praise and attention.

“You’re welcome,” Shota teases, patting Hitoshi’s head before pulling away entirely.

He catches his sister's eye; she grins widely, giving her brother a wave before finally rolling the window up and pulling away from the curb. He hears just the tail-end of the conversation, or perhaps the beginning of it, as the window shuts and the car pulls away— "I wouldn't say we're *friends* yet, mom, he's just... nice. I guess maybe we *could* be—"

...

"Sho..." Hizashi's voice pulls Shota from his thoughts.

The dark-haired man lets out a soft, 'humh' sort of noise as he drags his eyes up to meet his husband's gaze. Hizashi is now turned towards him, the take away bags forgotten on the counter behind him, and an unreadable expression twisted onto his face, "you... you brought 'toshi home with you...?"

"Of course I did," Shota bristles, straightening up, "he was hurt, Hizashi, and it certainly wasn't the first time he's come over. I wasn't going to send him home on the train without fixing him up. My sister would've decimated me if I had, which I would *never*."

"No, no," Hizashi frowns, hands raising in placating, surrendering type of way, "I don't care about that, Shota, you know I don't. I love 'toshi, and he's *always* welcome here. You *know* that. But... did you, like, warn him before bringing him home...?"

"Warn him?" Shota blinks, the defensive tension easing from his shoulder as he slumps against the door frame, "about?"

"*About?*" Hizashi repeats loudly in surprised disbelief, eyes wide like he doesn't believe Shota could ask such a thing. Shota feels worry flurry in his stomach as he takes in his husband's face, a frown pulling at his lips.

Hizashi stares for a second, like he's waiting for Shota to defend himself, or maybe to tell him it was a joke—he's not sure what he's supposed to be defending, nor what his husband was even going on about, "about Izuku, Shota! Did you not warn your nephew about the child we've taken in—the child *living with us*— before bringing him here? A child, might I remind you, that we did not have when Hitoshi last visited us a couple months ago?"

Shota's eyes sliver as his frown deepens. He doesn't dare open his mouth.

“Shota,” Hizashi’s voice comes out in a low warning, eyes hardening, “did you even warn Izuku that you were bringing someone back with you? Someone from school, from his grade? The kid he *beat* during the festival?”

Ah, the error in his judgment.

Shota has a sinking feeling that he’s done something terribly wrong here now, “no,” he breathes the word out. There’s no point in trying to lie, “I didn’t think it would matter. They... they knew each other already.”

“Knowing each other doesn’t mean they *like* each other,” Hizashi’s mouth is dropped open in genuine disbelief, “you can’t just... you can’t *spring* something like that on them—on either of them! We have a kid now, Shota, that’s *surprising*—especially to Hitoshi, who’s been the only child in your life besides Tenya, who doesn’t *really* count, considering before this school year, we only saw him a couple times a year. And Izuku is still settling in! You can’t just bring people *he knows* home with you—not without giving him a heads up!”

“I didn’t think it would matter,” Shota repeats with a frown, or, maybe he wasn’t thinking completely straight. Izuku had become a part of his everyday life now—to the point he didn’t need to think about it. It slipped his mind that Hitoshi and Izuku hadn’t really met, in the *nephew-foster son* way.

Plus, he was a little disoriented with the fact his nephew was *hurt*.

He might’ve seemed level headed, but there was something distinctly fear inducing that lit up in his chest when it came to the children in his personal life getting hurt—Hitoshi, Izuku and Tenya. He’s not sure why it *feels* different from when kids in his classes (well, maybe not this year’s 1-A, because they’re already different than any other year he’s had) got injured.

He had to keep a professional calm when dealing with school injuries, dealing with his kids being hurt, that was personal.

Hizashi’s mouth opens and closes twice, hands held out in front of him like he’s trying to decide between cupping Shota’s cheeks or clamping down on his shoulders and *shaking* some sense into him. He settles for cupping Shota’s cheeks in his hands, eyeing him with a sigh, “Shota, my love, my *darling*, I have absolutely no idea how you’ve survived this long with the social grace of a *toddler*.”

Shota cocks his head slightly, Hizashi's hands moving with him. "Surely I'm not that bad—"

The blonde's thumbs stroke lightly under his, one featherily grazing over his USJ scar as he snorts a laugh, "tell that to the foster kid who just got a surprise visit from the kid who *he beat* in the Sports Festival, and the nephew who just walked into our apartment to find the kid who *beat him* in the Sports Festival sitting on the couch, who is now your foster son."

Shota blinks, nose scrunching up, "well when you put it like that..."

"That's the only way to put it," Hizashi pats gently at Shota's cheek before pressing a kiss there. "Think of it like introducing a new cat to a cat you already have. You ease 'em into it, right? You can't just drop them a room together and hope for the best; you're more likely to get a cat fight if you do that."

Shota shakes his head, "they're fine now. It was a bit... *rough* at the start, I'll admit, but now they're on good terms. They're even having lunch together tomorrow. No cat fight."

"That's just because one of those metaphorical cats was *Izuku*," Hizashi sighs fondly, turning back to sorting through the fast food, "the literal embodiment of *sunshine*. Any other cat and someone would've lost an eye."

"Point taken," Shota heaves a heavy sigh. He slumps forwards to hook his chin over Hizashi's shoulder, leaning against Hizashi and letting the blond support his weight easily. He snakes his arms around his husband's waist and Hizashi lets his head fall to the side to his bumps softly against Shota's. "We should get another cat."

"No way," Hizashi laughs heartily, nosing at Shota's cheek, "let's just keep trying to navigate the *son* we just got, yeah? No more cats for now."

"Fine," Shota huffs, eyes slipping closed. "Three and a kid is alright for now anyways."

"What the fuck?" Shinsou repeats, voice low and unseeing gaze not straying from the fallen book. Oboro is floundering—he'd leapt up from the chair in his surprise and looked torn between fleeing the room, and picking the book back up, which Izuku *prays* he does not do.

“Oh man,” Oboro whispers, “I... I *definitely* think he noticed, Izu.”

You think, Oboro? You think?

“What?” Izuku manages to croak out, jumping up from the bed and standing at the book’s side. He catching a wide-eyed, panicked Oboro’s gaze, but forces his attention away instantly. “What... what happened?”

“What. The. Fuck?” Shinsou repeats for a third time, barely managing to look at Izuku before he’s glaring back down at the book like it’ll suddenly move as soon as his eyes are off it—and given the situation, that’s not farfetched. “Midoriya. What the fuck?”

“What?” Izuku asks again, this time keeping his voice neutral. It takes everything in him to swallow down the fear in his voice, but he’s not sure his heart will stop pounding in his chest until Shinsou’s gone and he’s had at least two hours to collapse in bed and not move a muscle. “W-what’s wrong?”

“The book, Midoriya,” Shinsou lifts a deathly still hand to point at the book on the floor.

“W-what about it?” Izuku winces internally at the stutter, “w-why are you so upset I left a-a book on the floor? I’m sorry, Shinsou, I’ll pick it up, alright?”

“Stop,” the purple-haired boy snaps, and Izuku does. He freezes in his steps and stares at the other teen like a deer caught in the headlights of a car. Izuku wilts as Shinsou’s gaze hardens on the book, eyes narrowing.

“You’re trying to tell me you left an open book in the middle of your floor? That’s what you’re really trying to tell me right now? Seriously?” Shinsou repeats in disbelief, finally jerking his attention up to Izuku, “no, Midoriya. No. Don’t play dumb. That book was *levitating*. That book just fell to the floor, *untouched*.”

“L-levitating?” Izuku repeats with a nervous laugh, hoping it doesn’t sound as nervous as it feels, “that’s... That's absurd, Shinsou. Books don’t... they don’t *float*, or-or levitate... do... do you need to sit down? Are you f-feeling okay? I can get your uncles—”

“Fuck off,” Shinsou gapes, nose wrinkles as he scowls in Izuku’s general direction. The purple-haired teen looks back at the book when Izuku can’t manage to open his mouth, “that just fell, don’t tell me I

imagined it—I'm not stupid, Midoriya. I saw it. I *heard* it."

"You're not!" Izuku agrees hurriedly, "I didn't mean—I know you're not—but-but it just... it fell off the edge. Of the desk. Because um... because g-gravity? P-pulled it down, like, um, like gravity does?"

"Damn right it was gravity! That's probably the only normal thing about this! The fact gravity did it's job!" Shinsou snaps, marching into the room and crouching down to look at the book, "gravity *dragged* the levitating book to the floor when... when *whatever* the hell was holding it up *stopped*. The book is nowhere near the desk, Midoriya. There is no way it could've fallen from the desktop and landed open, here. It's practically in the middle of your bedroom floor!"

Shinsou reaches a careful hand out, hesitating for a second like it might jump up and attack him, before flipping the book shut. He blinks down at the cover, then he's slowly lifting his gaze to Izuku's face, and the green-haired teen feels his cheeks heat up. Oh right, Oboro was reading that book.

Shinsou's mouth twitches like he's trying very hard to keep his expression neutral, "I didn't peg you as a romance novel kinda guy."

Izuku is not a romance novel kinda guy.

He's a Hero nerd— he mainly likes reading news articles and Hero forums online. Don't get him wrong, there's nothing wrong with it, reading romance novels; to each their own. He can get behind a romance film occasionally, and rom-coms are pretty good, but he'd never been one to sit down and read a romance novel.

He'd been beyond embarrassed as the librarian had blinked in surprise, studying Izuku intently as she'd checked the book out for him. A group of girls had been behind him too, and they'd giggled when they noticed it, smiling softly at his tomato-red face, and that, of course, had just made his embarrassment *worse*. He'd only gone through with it because Oboro was bouncing on his heels behind Izuku in the line, raving about having wanted to read that particular book for *years*.

The things he does for a ghost.

"Hey!" Oboro withdraws, voice squeaky as he worries his bottom lip between his teeth, pushing himself into the corner like he'd personally been called out on his novel choice, "Don't make it weird! There's nothing wrong with romance novels, I like the story line!"

“W-well, I... I like the story line,” Izuku winces as he says, eyes flicking down to the novel before looking away fast. “Don't make it weird.”

“I’m not,” Shinsou lifts his hands in surrender, still crouched by the book. “Like whatever you wanna like, man. It’s no difference to me. I just didn’t expect it is all. Seriously, I don’t care—”

A pause, Shinsou cuts himself off abruptly, gaze dropping back to the book.

“Besides!” Shinsou’s expression sharpens, like he’d forgotten for a second what started this in the first place, “It’s not you reading it that’s weird; it floating in mid-air and dropping to the ground is weird!”

“It-it wasn’t floating, Shinsou, that-that... that’s insane—that's um, *impossible*. Book don’t... It was just uh—”

“The wind!”

Izuku opens his mouth to repeat Oboro on instinct, but his jaw snaps shut instead as the words filter through his brain, thankfully.

He looks back at his bedroom window, which is shut tightly. No air is moving in his bedroom whatsoever. He chances a look back to glare at the ghost tucked in the corner, seemingly not to notice the window is even closed, and looking incredibly proud of himself.

“I threw it,” Izuku tells him instead, mentally wanting to face-palm. Oboro whines at his side about how he just missed a perfectly viable excuse.

“You threw it?” Shinsou narrows his eyes, still crouched by the book, “I thought gravity knocked it off your desk? Or that you were reading it in the middle of your floor?”

“No,” Izuku’s lungs wheeze as he stutters through his words, not taking a second to suck in any air in his panic, “I definitely threw it. You—you startled me, I um, I know I was expecting you, but you’re early, so, I uh, I thought I had time to read some of it... I just... um, threw it when the door opened?”

Shinsou seems to actually stall at this excuse, turning it over in his head a couple time to find any flaws to it. Izuku himself can pick out a dozen, but then again, he knows exactly why the book was floating

mid-air.

“That can’t be,” Shinsou shakes his head, hard expression melting to a worried defeated, “you’re wrong. I saw it floating, for-for like five whole seconds. You were on your bed on your *phone*, Midoriya! It’s literally still *on* and open where you tossed it onto your bed when I came in!”

Shinsou raises a hand to card stressfully through his purple hair, making it stand even crazier. He stares down at the book in disbelief before finally standing up and inching away from it, “I saw it. I’m not crazy, Midoriya.”

And ouch, isn’t that a dagger to the heart.

Dread pools in Izuku stomach as he takes in Shinsou. His eyes are wide with panic, and disbelief, and a hint of *fear*—but he’s not afraid of the book, or what he'd seen entering the room—no, Shinsou *is* afraid he actually is going crazy.

Izuku knows what that feels like. He knows what it’s like to be in Shinsou’s position, and not have anyone believe him. He knows how scary it is to think you’re going insane, when you’re not. He *knows*.

“You’re not,” Izuku forces out, ducking his head. It’s against his better judgment. His heart is pounding with panic, but he can’t let someone else feel like he does—like how he’d felt growing up. It’s cruel. He wouldn’t wish it on his worst enemy. “You’re definitely not crazy, Shinsou.”

“Really?” the teen gives a humorless laugh, turning away from the book to stare at Izuku with eyes blown wide. They’re dulled with fear, and uncertainty, “because it sure feels like I am! I saw a floating book, but apparently I didn’t! That-that makes me seem pretty crazy, Midoriya!”

“You’re not,” Izuku assures quietly, but sternly, catching Oboro’s gaze across the room. The ghost is frowning, watching Izuku intently like he’s trying to figure out what’ll happen next. “Please… just, not here. Okay? You’re not crazy, but… not here.”

Shinsou’s wide eyes search Izuku’s face. He glances back down at the book, then looks back at Izuku. The faintest amount of tension eases from his shoulders as he catches his bottom lip between his teeth, “where then?”

The green-haired teen bites his own lip, “c’mon.”

He’s followed by Shinsou and Oboro. He leads them both out of his room, and into the main living area. His guardians are in the kitchen, Shota at the table surrounded by class 1-A's most recent essay assignment, and Hizashi is stood at the counter prepping something as the coffee pot runs beside him.

“Hey, uh, S-Sho, ‘zashi?” Both turn to look at the two teenagers stood in the kitchen doorway, “Shinsou and I are gonna take a walk, okay?”

“And where are you two off to?” Shota asks, looking back down at his marking and circling something.

“Just a walk,” Shinsou answers instead of Izuku, before the green-haired teen can even formulate a response. Shinsou raises an eyebrow, looking between his uncles and Izuku, “why the concern, uncle Sho? Is Midoriya not allowed to leave without a chaperone?”

Izuku sputters in offense beside the purple-haired teenager, shooting him the most vicious glare he can muster up at the insinuation. Shinsou pretends not to notice, keeping his gaze on his uncle sat at the table. Izuku huffs a heavy, prominently annoyed breath before looking over at his foster parents.

“No!” Hizashi huffs in defense, shooting the purple-haired teenager a warning glance. “Of course he’s allowed to leave. He can come and go under the same household rules that apply to you too, Hitoshi.”

“Well,” Shota drawls, just as Hizashi finishes speaking, “to be fair, he probably *shouldn’t* be allowed out without a Pro chaperone, considering his growing track record.” Shota’s lips quirk upwards at his own words, but his gaze doesn’t stray from where he’s circling something else on the paper, “1-A are danger magnets, and unfortunately Problem Child is usually in the center of it.”

This time Shinsou is the one to attempt a straight face despite the smile threatening to twitch onto his lips. He glances over at Izuku, mouth uneven like he’s really struggling not to laugh. It doesn’t help that Oboro is also snickering behind him. Izuku pouts.

“Stop it,” Hizashi scolds his husband, waggling an accusing finger in his direction. Shota’s eyes lift briefly from his work to catch the action; the dark-haired man lets out a humored snort before dropping his gaze back down. “He does not need a chaperone! We trust you, Izuku, these two are just jerks.”

Hizashi pauses, eyeing Shota, before narrowing his eyes at Shinsou, who watches him right back, “I swear, Sho, he’s like your sarcastic little clone. He’s practically you from high school just—” Hizashi waves his hands, gesturing at a distance to Shinsou, mostly around his head, “more *purple*.”

Shinsou actually looks pleased at this, cocking his head to eye his uncle before looking back at Hizashi with a cocked eyebrow and crooked smile. “Thanks, uncle ‘zashi.”

“So not a compliment!” Hizashi huffs, wrinkling his nose. The annoyance is a poor front, considering the man’s lips twitch into a smile that he’s obviously trying to keep at bay. Shinsou laughs at this, and even Izuku snickers behind his hand. Oboro is muffling his own laughter into his sleeve, and even the corners of Shota’s lips have raised into a tiny smile.

Izuku isn’t entirely sure how to act right now.

There’s a flow to the dynamic that he’s just not a part of yet. It’s all clearly very familiar to these three, Shota and Hitoshi being sarcastic back and forth, with Hizashi being the middle man and keeping the peace. It’s natural.

“We’re just kidding around, Problem Child.” Shota looks up again when the laughter finally dies down a little. He catches Izuku’s eye, raising an eye brow in silent question. Shota’s gaze doesn’t waver, nor does he drop his attention back to his work until Izuku nods. He does know they’re just playing around—and truthfully, 1-A definitely *are* trouble magnets. Izuku is glad they’re as willing as they are to let him have freedom. “I trust you.”

“Honestly, Midoriya, we’re just riling ‘zashi up at this point,” Shinsou adds, flashing a toothy, sarcastically sweet smile at Hizashi when the man whips around to gape in offence at the teen.

“You two really are the worst!” Hizashi pouts for just a second before directing the conversation back, “we were just wondering where you two were off to because dinner will be ready soon. How long will you two be gone?”

“W-when will dinner be ready?” Izuku cocks his head.

Hizashi looks over at the clock, then down at his cooking before he’s turning to grab a mug from the cupboard and pouring Shota a coffee, “can you guys be back in forty-five minutes-ish?”

“Of course!” Izuku chirps, “I’ll set an alarm for half an hour so we can start walking back.”

Hizashi walks the mug to the table, eyeing Shota over his nose, “not that you deserve this, Aizawa.”

“I love you,” Shota hums, and Hizashi physically melts at the affection, handing the mug over. Shota finally sets the pen in his hand down in favor of clutching the mug of steaming coffee his husband had just passed over between his hands, “I don’t see a problem with it then, so long as you’re back by dinner and don’t run into any villains on the way.”

“That’s an oddly specific guideline,” Shinsou blinks, glancing between Shota and Izuku.

Shota shrugs tiredly, sipping at his coffee before glaring down at the essay before him distastefully, “it’s relevant.”

“Can’t argue with it,” Hizashi shrugs from where he’d retaken his spot by the counter, “and if you two are heading out, make sure you both have your phones too.”

“Like we don’t always have our phones on us,” Shinsou snorts, cocking his head in Hizashi’s direction with a tiny smile, “we are teenagers, uncle ‘zashi.”

“It’s not like we can forget with that attitude,” Shota throws back playfully, circling yet another thing on the essay. It’s more red pen strokes than printed black font at this point, and Izuku really, really hopes that one’s not his. “Now, shoo. I’d like to suffer through my marking in peace and quiet, while I question my choice of career. Besides, the longer you two hang out, the less time you’ll have to *walk*.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Shinsou huffs out, arms lacing over his chest.

“R-right!” Izuku yelps at the same time, grabbing onto Shinsou’s sleeve and dragging him away, “thank you! See you soon!” Izuku calls over his shoulder as he and Shinsou move to the door, each pulling on their shoes before stepping out.

“So… where exactly are we going?” Shinsou questions when they’re halfway down the hallway, “and what exactly couldn’t you tell me with my uncles around?”

“You, ah, you noticed that?” Izuku mumbles sheepishly, rubbing at the back of his neck. Oboro, behind them, lets out a prompt laugh.

“It was kinda obvious,” Shinsou shrugs. “So? Where are we going?”

“Just… follow me.”

The playground he’d found a couple blocks away from the apartment building hasn’t changed at all since the day Izuku and Oboro had had their heart-to-heart on the swings. It’s still poorly kept and overgrown, rusted ad weathered.

Shinsou eyes the place from the street as Izuku trudged on through long, un-mowed grass towards the swing set. “Is this where you’re going to kill me?”

“No,” Izuku snorts out, “I just know no one comes around here very often—I mean, look at the place.”

“Oh, I am,” Shinsou furrows his brow, “and I gotta say, I’m not filled with confidence that you *won’t* kill me here, despite your words.”

“It would be stupid to kill you now,” Izuku huffs out, gesturing the purple-haired teen to follow, “I’m the last person to see you, so I’d be the first suspect if I did kill you. That’s like murder one-oh-one. Now c’mon.”

Oboro snorts as Shinsou hesitates. “Was that supposed to reassure me?”

“Do you wanna know about the… um about what happened in my room, or not?”

“Just so you know,” Shinsou drawls as he finally follows suit, nose scrunching up as he treks through overgrowth, “if you do kill me now, know I’ll haunt you for the rest of your life.”

“Wow, ironic,” Oboro let out a surprised laugh. “Tell him to join the club.”

“I hate it here,” Izuku glares at the ghost, voice venomous and near silent. One look at the grinning blue-haired entity tells Izuku that Oboro knows he doesn’t mean the playground. It’s just loud enough to send Oboro into another fit of laughter. “You suck.”

“Awh, c’mon! You know you love me, Izu-chan!”

Izuku doesn't respond; he just drops down onto one of the swings. It's the one that Oboro had been on last time. He twists his hands around the chains, and sways himself slowly back and forth with a guiding foot on the ground.

The ghost wisely choices to lean against the swing set poles instead of taking the second swing, which Shinsou plops onto when he finally catches up. Neither of them says anything for a second, and even Oboro seems to read the tension, because he remains blissfully silent as well.

Izuku gives the other teen credit— he knows Shinsou is desperate for answers, but he's not pushing. He's sitting quietly beside Izuku as the green-haired teen tries to figure out how to ease into this. How do you tell someone something like this without them thinking *you're* crazy, and then also thinking *they're* crazy too if they actually *believe* you?

Well, he supposes there's only one place to start.

Izuku glares down at his knees, hands tightening around the chains, "do... do you believe in ghosts?"

And he holds onto a bated breath.

"Do I believe in ghosts?" Shinsou repeats flatly after a tense second, "that was just a joke, Midoriya. I thought you brought me here so you'd tell me what the *hell* just happened in your room, but if this is all just a *joke* to you—"

"It's not!" Izuku promises, swing chains rattling as he lets go of them, waving his hands before him. Shinsou wilts a little when he glances at Izuku, eyes narrowed like he's picking apart Izuku's expression. Izuku can only imagine he looks as panicked as he feels. "Really, it's not. I'm not... I wouldn't joke now. Not... not now. J-just," Izuku blows out a calming breath that really doesn't calm, "d-do you believe in ghosts? Serious question."

Shinsou watches him for another long second, and it feels like Izuku can't breathe under his prying eyes.

"Yes," he finally answers after a heavy sigh. Izuku hears the other swing creak as Shinsou starts to sway back and forth. He doesn't need to look over to know the other boy is watching him still, "why?"

"What would you say if I told you..." Izuku hesitates, chancing a quick glance at the other teen before dropping his gaze back to his lap and

clearing his throat, “if I told you they were real?”

Shinsou is quiet for a moment, and Izuku is internally panicking.

What if Shinsou leaves now and tells Shota and Hizashi that Izuku is insane? Will they keep him? Will it be a he-said-he-said battle where the two men have to choose who’s more trustworthy? Izuku wouldn’t stand a chance—they've known Shinsou since he was born, they just met Izuku a couple months ago—

“I’d tell you to prove it.”

Izuku jolts up from his crushing thoughts, “what?”

“If you were so sure they were real, I’d tell you to prove it.” Shinsou is not looking at Izuku anymore, he’s faintly swinging and staring off at the slide across the grassy field, “I can’t make up an excuse for why that book was floating, Midoriya. I can’t. It was floating, and then it just, it *dropped*. I don’t know why you’d want to *trick* me—I don’t even know *how* you’d make a book do that, but I can’t believe it off of just that.”

“You actually…” Izuku swallows, mouth and throat feeling dry, “you don’t think I’m crazy?”

“Any crazier than the guy who saw the levitating book?” Shinsou snorts, kicking his legs out and digging his heels into the patch of worn-down grass and dirt that proves the playground isn’t completely abandoned, “I believe in ghosts, but if you’re so sure, you’ve gotta prove it.”

“And the floating book wasn’t proof enough, seriously?” Oboro groans, slumping down against the pole, “there’s no lightbulb for me to play around with, Izu, I don’t know how I can prove myself. Why is everyone so *skeptical*?”

Without thinking, Izuku waves a hand out to silence the ghost.

Oboro sputters in offense, arms crossing over his chest as he glares, “rude.”

Shinsou watches with narrowed eyes, but doesn’t mention it, especially since Izuku hasn’t even realized he’d done it. Izuku’s quiet for a moment, until he finally finds his voice through the shock, “why are you… why aren’t you afraid? Why are you… even *humoring* me? Why haven’t you left? Told them that-that I’m insane?”

“You literally just asked if I believe in ghosts, I said yes, you asked if I’d believe you if you said they were real, and I said prove it because I already believe they’re real. You can’t go wrong with proof though, right? There’s literally nothing incriminating about that…? Besides, anything I tell them will fall back on me too. You clearly believe in ghosts; I believe in ghosts. I mean, we *both* saw that book—”

Shinsou cuts himself, overwhelmed. He lets out a stuttery breath that crumbles down his calm façade slightly.

“A book was floating in your room. That shit doesn’t just happen. We’re clearly on the same page—you know the apartment’s haunted too. You live there, surely you would’ve seen too. You’ve seen it too, yeah? I’ve known for years that that apartment was haunted. Weird stuff happens there, Midoriya, but I’ve never seen… *that*.”

“It’s not weird stuff,” Oboro pouts, “I’m just trying to live my afterlife, Kid.”

“I don’t just… believe it’s haunted,” Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, “I know it is, Shinsou—”

“Yeah, I know, I saw the book too—”

“I see ghosts.”

Shinsou freezes, and even Oboro falls through the pole he’s using as support, flapping his hands as he tried to find bearings before falling onto his ass. “Oh my God, you’re as *blunt* as Shota, Izuku!”

“You…” Shinsou blinks once, then twice before continuing, “you see them?”

Izuku swallows again with a tiny nod, “I see them. I… I see them, and hear them, and they… they follow me sometimes. I-I know it’s hard to believe, b-but, I’m not—I'm *not* crazy, Shinsou…”

“You s-see… you see ghosts…” Shinsou croaks out, voice startled and emotionless all at once. “Y-you—”

“You just broke Hitoshi,” Oboro has pulled himself up, rounding Izuku who’s watching both Shinsou and Oboro, and leaning almost face to face with Shinsou. “Good luck explaining this one to Sho and ‘zashi, ‘zuku.”

“Prove it.”

It feels like déjà vu. Hadn't he had this exact conversation with Kacchan.

"I swear," Oboro groans again, finally stepping away from Shinsou, "you teenagers all just think I'm some sort of show-pony, eh? Tell the ghost to do a trick and he will. I mean, *I will*, of course, because I *can* now, but it's still rude to assume that I'll be so compliant."

Izuku rolls his eyes at Oboro, and the ghost huffs in offense.

"Push me," Izuku says suddenly. Shinsou's eyes widen, and his gaze snaps to the other teen at the demand. The purple-haired teen opens his mouth to reply, but Izuku shakes his head apologetically, "s-sorry, not you."

Shinsou's mouth shuts with a click of his teeth, eyes wide. He gives a slow, uncertain nod in reply.

"I don't think I like your tone, Sir," Oboro's lip juts out in a pout.

Nonetheless, he moves swiftly to stand behind Izuku.

The green-haired teenager lifts his feet up off the ground, and Shinsou seems to copy him after a second of thought. He'll be the control aspect of this experiment. There's no wind, and neither of them move now that there's nothing of them touching the ground to guide them. Shinsou's eyes narrow as if he's come to the same conclusion.

Izuku holds his breath as Oboro finally reaches for the chains, hesitating just under Izuku's own white-fisted hands. The ghost finally closes the distance, and they both let out a breath when his hands grip the chains instead of phasing through. Izuku would look like an idiot if Oboro's proximity touch didn't work.

Oboro pulls the swing back slowly, like a parent drawing back to push their child, teenager and all, and Shinsou chokes on a breath beside him; eyes wide and watching intently. Oboro lets go when Izuku is pulled up enough that he'll actually sway a couple times, and gravity does its job, pulling Izuku down and the forwards by force.

"Y-you—wh-what...? T-there's a-a, what the *fuck*?"

Shinsou hasn't moved, but his feet are now planted on the ground and he's staring at Izuku like he's enigma. Oboro doesn't dare touch the swing again—he doesn't want to accidentally touch Izuku, not when he forgot to put on the heated jacket that recently arrived.

Izuku clenches his jaw anxiously, waiting for Shinsou to actually be able to competently put a sentence together. It takes a second. “You... you weren’t lying. You-you see ghosts. You just, you got a *ghost* to push you on the swing—”

“Only because he asked so *nicely*,” Oboro huffs sarcastically, shooting Izuku a dirty look. He’s clearly a bit annoyed still.

Izuku bites his lip, “I know it’s a lot to take in, but—”

“Wow, uh, okay,” Shinsou rubs heavily at his eyes with the heels of his palms, seeming to finally be coming out of his shock. He shakes his head, glaring up at the sky, “there’s a ghost. There’s a ghost *here*. Right now. You... you have a ghost friend. Y-You see ghosts, and they’re your friends...”

A pause where Shinsou finally looks over at Izuku, staring intently like he’s trying to understand him, “I... can’t wrap my head around that. That’s wild. You couldn’t have said you have... I don’t know, that you have some underlying telekinesis Quirk or somethin’?”

“W-well, I—” Izuku sputters, jaw snapping shut as dread pools in his stomach. It could’ve been that easy. That was a good, logical excuse. A lot more logical than *‘I see ghosts’*. Plus... “that... make sense. My mom has a telekinesis Quirk. That... that actually would’ve been—ah, S-Shinsou, would you um, believe I have a residual telekinesis Quirk from my mom...?”

“No chance in hell,” Shinsou glares, like, full on glares. “Nice try, but I literally just gave you that excuse. Maybe if you’d told me *before* admitting to the ghost thing?”

“Yeah,” Izuku huffs, shaking his head. “True.”

“So... do they know?”

Shinsou is staring right at Izuku now, not even looking around to try and spot the ghost like Kacchan had. Oboro is watching Shinsou closely, eyebrows furrowed like he’s also waiting for the other teen to try and locate him.

“W-what?” Izuku whispers out, green eyes locking with purple.

Shinsou eyes him lightly, soft and cautious, “my uncles; do they know? That you... about your ability?”

“No!” Izuku scrambles off the swing, “no, and they can’t! I-I can’t... they *can’t* know, Shinsou, I can’t... I can't do it again. P-please, you-you can’t tell them! They c-can't know!”

“Hey, relax,” Shinsou stands too, slowly and more graceful than Izuku, “I won’t tell them if you don’t want me to. I don’t know why you won’t; why you’re so scared, but I won’t. I promise. So, who knows?”

“J-just, um, just Bakugou from my class. He’s the only one who... who believes me. Now, I mean.”

“Him?” Shinsou scrunches his face up, “the guy from the Sports Festival? That guy’s a dick. Why would you tell him?”

“I always knew I liked this kid.” Oboro puffs his chest out, nodding proudly at an unassuming Shinsou.

“Childhood friend,” Izuku answers as if his ghost friend didn’t say a thing. “He knew me when I was little... when I didn’t um, hide it?”

“What about your parents?” Shinsou frowns, “don’t they know?”

Izuku wilts, dropping back onto the swing.

Shinsou seems to realize his error almost instantly, eyes widening, “ah, shit, sorry, Midoriya. I forgot there’s probably something going on if you’re staying with Shota and Hizashi.” Shinsou pauses, mouth pressing into a line at the thought. A second later his face twists like he’d eaten a slice of lemon, “...and I’m going to guess it has something to do with this... uh, the ghosts.”

And he hit the nail on the head.

Izuku doesn’t answer, just stares down at his hands.

“I’m overstepping again,” Shinsou decides loudly, “I should work on that. Sorry, Midoriya—”

“Izuku,” Izuku winces at his cracking voice, “please, uh... Izuku is fine. Instead of... of Midoriya. I mean, you know my darkest secret now, right?” *Well, one of them...* “That makes us friends... if, ah, if you want, I mean—y-you don’t have too! It’s fine—”

“Hitoshi then,” Shinsou answers easily, shrugging his shoulders. He doesn’t reclaim his swing, so Oboro does instead, watching the exchange like it’s the most interesting film he’s ever watched. “It’d be

weird if I called you Izuku, and you still called me Shinsou, right? I mean, we *are* basically cousins."

"R-right," Izuku accepts the excuse with a light smile.

Izuku is so glad Hitoshi just goes with the flow on this. He's not pushing Izuku for answers about his parents, and he's not weirded out that Izuku is asking to be called by his given name after not even two weeks of friendship.

Izuku's phone dings in his pocket and the two of them (the ghost as well) jump in surprise. He shuffles the device out to turn off the warning alarm, "we... we should start heading back."

"Sure," Hitoshi nods, offering Izuku a hand. Izuku takes it with a cocked expression and Hitoshi tugs him up. Oboro huffs a laugh and follows his lead. "Man, you're freezing."

"Yeah," Izuku nods, "it's a whole thing. Um, ghost related."

Hitoshi's eyebrows furrow in confusion, but his only response is a quiet, "ah."

They fall into step together—both walking quietly. Oboro is at Izuku's side, walking on the road, unfazed by cars phasing through him occasionally as they pass by. The silence doesn't last long.

"So..." Hitoshi rubs at the back of his neck, "the apartment really *is* haunted, yeah? I mean weird shit does happen... How many ghosts are there? Have, like, they always been there? Did they come with the apartment and stay with my uncles?"

"It, um, j-just one ghost. He's... he's a good guy. You don't have to be worried about him." Izuku pauses, looking at his side where Oboro is watching, following the conversation, "he's been around for... for a while. He likes Shota and Hizashi."

"That's cool," Hitoshi nods, "but it's also scary as fuck. He's really nice?"

"Yeah," Izuku can't help but smile as Oboro grins. "He's really cool."

"He have a name?"

Izuku hesitates at this. Does Hitoshi know Oboro? Would he remember him? Izuku does not want Oboro's name, or presence

getting out—he doesn't want Shota or Hizashi to know. "...'ro," Izuku tells his friend slowly, "he, uh, he answers to 'ro."

"Well, I do now, I suppose." Oboro huffs dramatically, as he shoots Izuku a small smile.

"Ro," Hitoshi tastes the name, looking around them subtly, "hey, Ro, nice to meet you, I guess. You've scared me since I was like a baby, but it's nice to know you're cool. I take it you're the romance novel guy then—so, you into the raunchy stuff or are you just a romantic softie?"

"I like the plot!" Oboro whines loudly and Izuku just loses it.

Shinsou pauses at Izuku's side as the cackling teenager folds in half, struggling to breathe through his laughter. Shinsou pats Izuku's back, "it's the raunchy stuff, right? Ro, you fiend."

Oboro cards his fingers through his hairs and groans out a noise that sounds more like defeated growl than anything else. Izuku decides then that he might actually like having someone he can talk to.

Chapter End Notes

Hi again! Thanks fo much for taking the time to read! And thank you to everyone who left a comment on the last chapter! We have over 150 comments on it as I'm writing this. That's insane, so thank you all! It means the world that you guys are liking this as much as I am, and supporting it!

I've made up parents for 'toshi, but not sure how much they'll appear in this fic. I've got ideas for add on fics though, if I have any time between this, work and life in general, but let me know what you think of Sho's sister thus far? She doesn't have much character yet, but I'm still curious!

I'll leave this author's note here because I'm tired, but as always, comments are very greatly appreciated! Kudos are also great to see! I'm so thankful for you all, thank for all the interaction this thing gets! <3

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

> Hello!
>
> So sorry this is a bit late! Guess who wrote more than half a chapter before realizing that they *missed* a full chapter? It me. I did that. There's also been a couple tags added in relation to this chapter, so check those out before reading. It gets a bit emotion in this chapter, so be warned :)
>
> Anyways! I am back on track! Hope you enjoy this update~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The end of term final exam sneaks up on Izuku, despite the fact that both his guardians, and all of his teachers reminded them near daily that it was fast approaching.

Well.

It didn't *sneak up* on him, but he still feels woefully unprepared for it.

He'd studied— alone, in groups with his friends, partnered with Hitoshi in Izuku's bedroom, with Oboro— he'd even roped his guardians into impromptu study sessions where he got them to quiz him; when they had the time to help, at least.

He'd had high hopes about getting at least decent marks on the written part of the exam, but he'd been silently stewing over the exercise part of the exam.

None of the teachers had said anything about it, and what it entailed —they'd gotten few to none hints, no clues. Shota had said that without a doubt they have some knowledge on the exercise test, but that doesn't really dwindle their options of what this test could actually entail down much.

They've done a lot in the first couple months.

They didn't know if they were fight robots like in the Entrance Exam, or each other like in those battle trials on the second day of classes, or... or he's not even sure what else they *could* possibly be doing?

He knows it'll be hard though. This is Yuuei High School, and they're training to be Heroes. Of course it'll be grueling and difficult, Izuku knows that Principal Nezu and the teachers will find a way to really test them, he just... doesn't know *how* they'll do it...

It's hard to prepare yourself for something so vast— this exercise portion of the exam could literally be anything.

He knows better than to ask his guardians— and honestly, he doesn't want any handouts. He wants it to be fair. He wants to find out at the same time as his peers. He doesn't want extra help; not when it'll put him at an advantage that none of his friends and classmates will be getting. Plus, he knows his guardians won't tell him anything. They'd probably be disappointed in him too, and he definitely doesn't want that.

He can study as much as he'd like for the written aspect, he can do as well as to ace it (hopefully), but in the end, he can still draw the short straw when it comes to the exercise portion of their exams. He can still fail that, depending on what it happens to be, and the thought's been nagging him since it was announced.

He didn't know what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn't real-life combat battle simulations. *Against their teachers*. He'd mentally psyched himself up for a lot, but he hadn't expected something like this. Not only did his final grade depend on his own actions, knowledge and fighting, but it also depended on who he was partnered with, and who he was facing off against.

Because they were partnering up, and battling one of their teachers in pairs. One of their *Pro Hero* teachers.

And of course he'd be partnered with *Kacchan* and facing off against *All Might*.

He'd expected a hard fight walking into it. Not only were he and Kacchan not on particularly good terms, despite the fact they'd had the heart-to-heart and cleared some of their misunderstandings. Kacchan hadn't changed at all when it came to his attitude at school, and his fierce determination to surpass both Izuku and All Might and become the Number One Hero.

They're hardly seconds into the exam when Kacchan gives Izuku a sharp shove and an order for Izuku to stop talking, eyes narrowed in annoyance that cut the green-haired teen's attempts at strategizing off. Kacchan is clearly not on board with the notion to get to the escape

door. The ashen-haired teenager's lip curls into a snarl as he continues on, announcing that he doesn't need Izuku's help in the first place to win the fight.

Izuku can't help but snap at his childhood friend that this, the anger and bad attitude, is why no one likes him. It's said in the heat of the moment, and Izuku honestly doesn't mean it—he's just frustrated that Katsuki isn't taking this seriously. That he isn't looking at this partnership as the advantage that it is. Neither of them alone can take out All Might, it's just not logical; but together... maybe they have a shot.

It's in one ear and out the other, as it tends to be when Katsuki is riled up.

The argument between them is a wrench thrown into Izuku's plan of a clean escape victory—not to mention the fact that All Might was not going easy on them in the slightest. If Izuku couldn't see the super compact weighted bracelets on All Might's wrists and ankles as a handicap of sorts to attempt at levelling the playing field slightly, he might've assumed the Pro had just forgone them. All Might was powerful—it was no surprise now that he was Japan's Number One Hero with this unrivalled power.

Unfortunately, that just seemed to piss Kacchan off.

Looking at it from a strategical stand point, their best bet to win and pass the exam was to avoid All Might at all cost and go down the escape and flee path. They're greatly overpowered, and All Might isn't the Number One Hero for nothing. Izuku knows they should escape while they can, while there's the chance to, but when has Katsuki ever listened to him?

Izuku just curses under his breath as he follows his childhood friend into a fight he *knows* they're at a disadvantage in, despite the handicap on the opposing side.

All Might does not go easy on them in the slightest, not that he expected any of their Pro teachers to. Still, he might go just a teeny bit overboard.

The Pro plays his part far too well, declaring that he's a villain, and that collateral damage to the surrounding area, a mock town, means nothing to him—which is a very villainous thing to say.

There's hardly a second to strategize before the Pro is charging at

them.

Izuku tries to convince Kacchan to flee with him again, but it's in vain; they're going to lose, and fail the exam at this rate.

How will he be able to look the Number One Pro in the eyes if he does fail? Or Shota, when the man hears that Izuku had lost? The pressure riding on this examination is suffocating, it's not just a win or fail sort of thing, not for Izuku.

He needs to prove himself. He needs to pass. There's so much riding on this, so many people cheering him on, and he can't fail and let them down. Too many people have put so much time and effort into helping him, and he refuses to let that go to waste—for them to think, even for just a second, that it hadn't helped in the long run.

They almost lose within the first five minutes—Kacchan gets cocky and overconfident, and the idiot doesn't see the danger; he's too confident to. Before Izuku knows, All Might has Kacchan pinned under him, and Izuku stuck under guardrail. For a second, it seems hopeless; as Kacchan sprouts off nonsense about preferring to lose over putting his trust into a teammate.

They only make an escape when Izuku uses Full Cowl to free himself from the guardrail confides. He's not entirely sure how he manages to get Kacchan out of All Might's grasp, but he does—and then he's running, angry blonde along for the ride.

Izuku tries to talk some sense into his hardheaded childhood friend, but he's not entirely sure it really works. Kacchan is stubborn, even more so when it involves Izuku trying to convince him.

They come to an almost silent truce between the two of them.

There's trial and error to their partnership—team building and arguments. Izuku and Kacchan had never really seen eye to eye, not since that Quirkless diagnosis eleven years ago, but for now—just for this— it appears his classmate is willing to try put them on an equal playing field.

They come up with some good strategies—Kacchan lets Izuku use one of his Grenadier Bracers, and in doing so, they finally get something over on All Might. It's small, in the long run, but it feels *good*. It feels like this isn't entirely in vain, and that they *might* even have a chance at making it out of this exam with a passing grade.

With All Might momentarily distracted, they dash towards the escape gate.

They don't make it far. The window of time to rush out the exit door unscathed has closed, and now they're left to fight. All Might is on them now, and he's not going to go easy on them in the slightest; he won't let them just escape.

So, they fight.

All Might praises them and their ability to work together despite the well-known rivalry the two have. Izuku knows that the Pro is speaking honestly, he really is proud of the progress, but he still can't help but feel that it's almost mocking to be praising them during a fight—during an exam. The praise is followed by All Might announcing that the two of them being paired together, forced to work together if they want a passing grade, is just a pre-requisite of the practical exam.

It's more of a blow considering All Might has both of them pinned as he tells them.

Izuku feels stupid for not even thinking about why they'd been paired together in the first place. Their rivalry is, after all, common knowledge, and if they can't work together in something like this, an important exam that could very well make or break their futures as Heroes, then they can't be trusted to work together and interact like civil human being out in the real world where it *really* matters.

Nothing their teachers do is of coincidence—Izuku should really start taking that into account.

Izuku's not sure how All Might gets them both pinned so fast. How he destroys Kacchan's Grenadier Bracers easily, with a casual, yet mocking reminder that the weight bracelets are forcing him to use only a miniscule of his strength—and Izuku swears his heart drops into his stomach at the reminder. All Might had smashed Kacchan's gear like a peanut—and he *did* only have access to a bare minimum of his strength.

Izuku is hardly aware of the rest of his exam. He's in pain, and his thoughts are moving too fast for even him to keep up with. All Might is quick, and smart, and he's making a point to reinforce the fact that he's superior.

The rest of the exam is grueling. There're explosions and more pain.

He faintly remembers a panicked attempt at using Full Cowl again, but All Might stops him by throwing him against the ground. All Might throws Izuku around like he's a weightless ragdoll, and his wheezes out breaths as he's slammed into the ground, and into buildings and All Might even uses his New Hampshire and blasts himself into Izuku—and Izuku feels like he might black out under the pain and weight of the Pro.

There're a few times in that period of time that Izuku thinks they're done for, but somehow, they keep going. They keep fighting.

Izuku struggles to his feet, hardly even aware of the fact that Kacchan and All Might are even talking. He barely even hears his childhood friend demand that Izuku get up and escape. He sees explosions out of the corner of his eye, and it's a long second before Izuku's rattled brain comes to the conclusion that Kacchan is sacrificing himself for their grade—so Izuku can make it to the escape gate while he distracts the Pro.

When Izuku is finally standing up, wobbling from the ache in his whole body, he activates Full Cowl, ready to charge for the escape gate.

But he can't.

Kacchan is urging him on from under All Might, and the Pro himself is preparing to attack Izuku now to ensure he doesn't escape. But he freezes in place when All Might forces Kacchan into the ground.

How can he leave?

Kacchan is in trouble—and this may just be an exam, and this may all be... *fake*(ish?), considering All Might is their teacher and they're really in no *real* danger. It's not a real villain fight, but it sure feels like it is. But how is he supposed to just flee when his partner is in trouble? What kind of a hero would that make him?

Izuku's not entirely sure where the idea to punch All Might across the face comes from. All Might recoils back, both in surprise and from the force. Izuku uses that second of recoil to grab his partner and *sprints* towards the escape gate, towing Kacchan, who's now unconscious, along with him.

Izuku passes through that gate, and if feels like he can suddenly breath again. He settles Kacchan down gently beside him and collapses after him, huffing heavy breaths.

They'd *passed*.

Izuku's recollection is a bit fuzzy after that. He'd hazy memories of All Might smiling proudly down at him before he's scooping both teenagers into his arms carefully. Then next thing he knows is that's in Recovery Girl's tent and he no longer feels like he'd been New Hampshire Smashed through a couple walls and the floor.

The teen hides a smile behind his hand as he listens to Recovery Girl scolding All Might for not restraining himself. All Might bows his head sheepishly, as Izuku shifts on the cot he'd woken up on. He'd been given permission from the Youthful Heroine to stick around and watch the rest of the exams, despite the lingering pain and exhaustion.

He's awake and alert, that's all that matters—even if Recovery Girl had begrudgingly agreed, even though he knows she'd rather send him back to Yuuei to recover in peace.

"Oh," the woman calls to the other Pro who freezes in the doorway, clutching a still unconscious Katsuki in his arms, "I'd watch out for Aizawa and Yamada if I were you, Yagi," she continues after a second, glancing at Izuku, where she gives a light smile, voice humored, "I can only imagine Aizawa won't be very pleased to see the lengths you went to against these two boys when he watches the recordings back, and, well, Yamada's quite fond of his *favorite* little Listener, now, isn't he?"

Izuku's not sure he's ever seen All Might's expression drop quite so quickly.

Izuku lets out a quiet laugh at the look on All Might's face at the mention of Aizawa-Sensei and Present Mic being upset with him. It's hilarious that even Japan's Number One Hero is afraid of Shota and Hizashi.

The Pro leaves quickly after that, eyes wide and shifty like Shota will spring out of nowhere and rope the Number One Hero in his capture weapon.

All in all, the exams went fairly well.

Oboro, who'd been banned from even *watching* Izuku's practical exam in fear they'll have another Sports Festival incident on their hands, had bounced between Hizashi and Shota's own fights against their students.

He recounts the funny bits—Hizashi screaming as he was covered by Kouda's army of insects and Shota's face of impressed uncertainty as Yaoyorozu launched flash grenades hidden in Russian nesting dolls at him.

Oboro bounces on his heels at Izuku's side while the teen watches the rest of the battles unfolding on Recovery Girl's screens. Hizashi, Jirou and Kouda are just finishing up their fight when Oboro arrives in, probably joining them now since Recovery Girl had just announced Izuku and Kacchan's victory, and he knows Shota had already finished his battle against Todoroki and Yaoyorozu since Recovery Girl announced it while they'd still been fighting All Might.

At the end of the exam period just four of Izuku's classmates fail the exam. Izuku feels awful that Kaminari, Kirishima, Ashido and Satou had all failed. He doesn't know what that means for them, but he's hopeful they'll be able to pass whatever comes next.

Everyone meets back up at Yuuei when the examinations are done. No one is overly injured besides scrapes and bruises—well, except Katsuki, who's just recently come back to consciousness and Izuku, who sure feels the harrowing battle in his muscles.

Shota is less than pleased to see Izuku and Katsuki in the states they're in when he arrives back at the school. Though both teens are healed, there's still lingering bruising and stiff pain. Plus, Izuku is sure Shota had talked with Recovery Girl after all the exams were finished.

Aizawa makes a good point that none of the other examinees had come out of this test as beaten up as Katsuki and Izuku. All Might looks thoroughly scolded at just the simple, stiff observation, and Izuku knows that All Might should just be glad Hizashi is still in the shower in an attempt to wash the feeling of bugs on his skin away. He'd just hit the hour mark of his shower, according to Shota.

He'd seen Hizashi angry with All Might that say he'd come out of the conference room with the man after their argument, and he honestly believes Oboro when the ghost says that Hizashi can be way scarier than Shota.

The class is thankfully dismissed early after everyone's regrouped in 1-A's classroom. They know now who'd passed and failed simply from seeing each other's faces—either twisted with exhausted elation, or crippled with defeat.

Shota assures them that after he's reviewed the videos and written

exams, they'll get their final overall grade. They haven't seen their written exam grades yet, but they do know where they stand in the practical portion simply by the outcome today.

"No one failed the written portion of the exam," he tells them with a bored look, "but a few of you did fail the practical test today. Now, you will all be going to the forest lodge—the consequences of not being allowed to attend the trip was just a logical ruse to ensure you all did your best today."

The man pauses, eyeing them all before that scary smile is curling onto his face, "and I forgot to mention; the forest lodge is *actually* a bootcamp. Another rational deception. Those of you who failed the practical test will be subjected to harsher training as a consequence. I assume you're all up to the challenge?"

Shota looks pleased at the groans of his class.

Not only did they fall for another logical ruse, but their fun camping trip has been spun around into additional training. Izuku thinks they should just start suspect everything is twisted around into a way that'll end up being educational or disguised training.

"You're all dismissed. Take one of these lodge guides before you leave. Make sure you have all the necessary items before the trip." The man surveys over them with an unreadable expression, but no one lingers long enough to notice, well, besides Izuku.

"One of these days, we will catch on to your so-called *logical ruses*," izuku mumbles under his breath.

Shota breathes out a puff of laughter, one eyebrow arching challengingly, "fool you once, shame on *me*. Fool you twice, shame on *you*. Fool you three times, well," Shota gives him a tiny, teasing smile, "we'll cross that bridge *when* we come to it."

Izuku lets out a humored snort as he tucks his hands in the pockets of his slacks and follows his guardian out of the empty classroom.

Shota and Izuku wait in the teacher's lounge for another good half an hour before Hizashi finally steps out of the faculty restroom, dressed in a spare set of civilian clothes, with his hair down and wet. He's holding his Hero costume in a plastic bag away from his body, grimacing like bugs will crawl out of the sealed knot and attack him.

Shota heaves a sigh as he takes the bag from his husband, and

Hizashi's tense frame eases when the bag is out of his hold. He still shoots it uncertain, skeptical glances even as he steps away from Shota and the bag entirely.

Then his eyes fall on Izuku, who hadn't gotten up off the couch just yet.

"Sheesh, Sunshine," Hizashi frowns as his eyes trail over the teen's small frame, "rough day? You look like you got hit by a bus."

"More like a *meteorite* crashed into him," Shota scoffs, eyeing the teen's bruises distastefully. "Yagi smashed him into the ground. Multiple times. And he did quite a number on Bakugou too," Shota relays bluntly before Izuku can even open his mouth.

"He *what*?" the blonde stiffens back up, glance shooting from his husband to his foster child. Izuku sees a glint of what he can only call *danger* in Hizashi's eyes, and he really doesn't want any more fights—not today, at least. "This-this was a test! Not an *actual* villain fight! Why the hell would he go that hard on first year—"

"It's alright!" Izuku waves his hands frantically, "I'm fine now, and um, Shota and Recovery Girl already scolded him. Besides, it was... it was a challenge. A good challenge for Kacchan and I, and, um, all that really matters is that we passed, right...?"

"Yes," Shota finally relents after a tense moment of silence, "you're right. We're very proud, Problem Child. I'm sure your victory was very noteworthy, and I'm positive I'll fear for your life on more than one occasion when I watch it back—according to Recovery Girl's passing comments, at least."

"Do not show me that video," Hizashi's eyebrows furrow, a frown pulling at his lips, "I don't think my heart could take it. Honestly, I still don't know how All Might is even allowed *in* a school, let alone allowed to *teach* them. Who goes full force on first year students, anyways?"

"He wore the bracelets," Izuku assures as he finally stands up, stretching out his stiff back. "He was handicapped just like the rest of the teachers. It was fair."

"He definitely should've had more of a handicap. His overpowered Quirk was an oversight," Shota shakes his head. He sighs heavily and adjusts his hold on the bag of Hizashi's costume, making the blonde jump in surprise and step away from him. Shota just blows out an

amused breath as his lip quirk upwards, “it’s too late now; what’s done is done. We know for next time now though. Even Nezu wasn’t as cruel to his students.”

“Kaminari and Ashido failed,” Izuku deadpans.

“But they were unscathed. Physically, at least,” Shota shrugs with a light smile. “I can’t say the same about you and Bakugou.”

“But we passed!” Izuku reminds lightly as he shuffles along behind his guardians.

“My kiddos were completely fine!” Hizashi grins between them, chest puffing out proudly, “*anddd*, they passed too. It was a near perfect exam, if I do say so myself!”

“Says the man who just spent the last hour and a half in the shower after his ‘*near perfect exam*’. Your kids beat you with nothing more than a couple *bugs*—”

“A couple?” Hizashi yelps dramatically, turning to gape at his expressionless husband, “that was an *army* of bugs! All… all over me. C-crawling on me… G-ross. Bugs are icky, Shota. And like you did any better. Todoroki and Yaoyorozu beat you too. Pretty fast.”

“I know,” Shota offers no additional argument, just lets out a small, proud smile. “They did well.”

“Awh, a proud dad,” is whispered behind Izuku. The green-haired teen physically chokes back a noise that’s somewhere between a gasp and a startled burst of laughter. He’d almost forgotten Oboro had been waiting with them too. “How cute!”

Izuku is so very glad that his teachers do not hear the ghost. Oboro falls into step beside Izuku, grinning widely, obviously proud of how close he’d come to making the younger teen laugh.

It’s that night that Izuku gets a text invitation to the mall.

His night had thankfully been uneventful; his guardians just as drained as he felt.

Hizashi had all but demanded he take a nice long, hot bath to ease his tense and aching muscles and Izuku had never been more appreciative as he relaxed completely in the steaming water. He hadn’t known he needed it until after he was shoulder deep in the bathtub. Following

that, they'd had celebratory katsudon delivered to the apartment. It hadn't compared to Hizashi's homemade version in the slightest, but still tasted fine.

The early bedtime is entirely his choice and it's so nice to just collapse in his bed and cover himself in warm, fuzzy blankets. He's tired, and worn out. Still bruised and sore, but it's so much better now than it had been.

He's lying in bed, nearly asleep—ready to let the day be over— when his phone chimes with an incoming message. He's not surprised to see Uraraka's name flash on his screen. Very few people actually text him, despite the fact he has half of his classmates' numbers.

"Who's textin' ya?" Oboro asks with halfhearted interest from the desk. He's sitting at Izuku's desk, a book laid open on the desktop. The ghost doesn't even look up when he speaks, but to be fair Izuku's lidded eyes are on his phone.

"Uraraka," Izuku tells the ghost with a yawn, shifting so he's leaning on his elbow and can actually read the message on his lock screen, "I guess a lot of us don't have some of the stuff Shota wants for the bootcamp, so Hagakure suggested we make a day of it and all meet up at the mall to shop tomorrow."

"Oh yeah?" Oboro finally looks up from his book, "you gonna go? Sounds like it could be fun, eh?"

"We haven't really all hung out together yet, but I think most of the class is on board, at least according to Uraraka," Izuku shrugs, stifling another yawn. "I'll ask in the morning."

"I doubt they'll have a problem with it," Oboro snorts out, looking back down at his book.

"Yeah," Izuku hums out, not interacting with notification at all. He's not awake enough to trust himself not to text something stupid back. He's sure she won't mind a morning text back. He plugs in his phone and finally collapses back into his pillows.

His guardians do not have a problem with it.

Hizashi is more than enthusiastic to drop Izuku off at the mall on his way to the radio station to do the behind the scenes work on his show. He tells Izuku all about it on the drive to the mall, but despite his attention, Izuku's not sure what the majority of it means.

Most of his class has gathered when he arrives—everyone but Todoroki and Kacchan had agreed to come, so they wait for the stragglers to arrive before anything is decided.

To Izuku's surprise, everyone splits up when everyone's there. It reasonable, since everyone needs different things, but he'd thought when they suggested a group hang out the group would actually... well, *hang out*.

Everyone splits off into small groups and pairs and soon it's just Izuku and Uraraka left—not that he minds. He likes her; she's probably one of his closest school friends, not to mention the first friend he'd really had besides Kacchan who... didn't quite count.

Izuku himself doesn't really need anything on Shota's guide list, since Hizashi assured him that anything he might need they had extras of since every year Shota chaperones the bootcamp, something is always missing, then rebought only to be found *after* the bootcamp is over.

Since everything is already there, Izuku had accepted the invitation under the notion of getting to know his classmates, and to take the opportunity to find some wrist weights for his workouts and training. Seeing All Might do as he'd done while also suffering with the handicap had put some things into perspective for the teen.

Uraraka is looking for items on Shota's list—mainly bug repellant.

Izuku has half a mind to tag along with her even though he doesn't need bug repellant (Hizashi has a whole stash of it), but before he can even suggest it, she's running off, much to his confusion. He doesn't follow her, just cocks his head to the side and watches the girl disappear into the crowd.

Well.

"I don't think your classmates know the definition of '*hang out*'," Oboro chimes behind Izuku, a disappointed frown present on his lips. "Why make it a class activity is everyone's just gonna do their own thing?"

The teen shrugs, shifting where he's stood.

"Oh," Izuku stiffens up as someone's arm wrapped around his shoulder, tugging him into someone's side. He doesn't recognize the voice, and he knows for certain it isn't one of his classmates—they'd all just left. "It's someone from Yuuei. Cool!"

The voice is deep and unfamiliar, as is the body that tugs him closer.

“’zuku...” Oboro’s voice is cautious and clipped, “do you... know this guy?”

“And... weren’t you also one of the guys who ran into the Hero Killer in the Hosu incident?”

A strike of fear runs up Izuku’s spine. This person... knows about that? No one is supposed to— none of them were even *mentioned* in the media coverage following the Hosu incident. According to the police chief and Endeavor, who’d been the face of the arrest, it was an underground Hero to catch the murder, not three high school students.

How... how does this person know something so confidential?

“Y’know...” the arm around his shoulders shifts so it’s more so around his neck, and tightens faintly, “imagine my luck to run into one of you Hero kids for the second time...”

Izuku stiffens the second it clicks just who’s clutching him. The hooded figure seems to realize he's been found out to by the soft bout of sadistic laughter. Izuku turns his head enough to see a crooked grin that bordering on psychotic, and frantic red eyes. Pale hair falls in the figure’s face, but Izuku doesn’t need a full view to *know*.

The voice, and the hooded-man's pale hair click together—he hadn’t seen this man’s face before, he’d just seen hands. One hand stuck on his face. And he’d only seen him once. At... at the USJ, where Shota had almost *died*. Izuku’s heart stutters in his chest as the figure’s name clouds his thoughts.

Shigaraki Tomura, the leader of the League of Villains.

Oh no.

“Fuck!” Oboro gasps behind Izuku, and the green-haired teen know he’s now come to the same conclusion. “Oh my God. Fuck, Izuku, you need to get away from him—”

And he would, definitely, if four fingers didn’t circle around his neck casually.

“Act casual, like I’m an old friend,” Shigaraki demands him easily, last remaining lifted finger waving back and forth threateningly, “I want

to talk to you."

Shigaraki explains his Quirk under his breath, just for Izuku's ears; even though Izuku already gets the gist of it. He'd seen what it can do. He'd seen what it had done to Shota's elbow— thoughts of his Sensei's elbow crumbling away and the mental image of Asui turning to dust as his side swirl in his head, and he can't help the nervous swallow.

Izuku puts up a fight at first, threatens what he assumes Shigaraki already knows—that if he uses his Quirk, a Hero will come. But it's a weak defense. At that point, Izuku would already be dying, or dead. And all these innocent civilians would be in danger. He can't do that.

The fight leaves Izuku's body, "what do you want to talk about?"

Izuku lets the villain lead him along. For a guy holding someone hostage, Shigaraki doesn't appear to be in much of a hurry as he directs Izuku along, fingers tightening and relaxing around his neck rhythmically, almost as if the reflexes are subconscious.

Shigaraki finds a nice spot for them to chat in the center of the mall, sitting directly in the plaza.

They talk about Stain at first, and Izuku tries not to be confused. Shigaraki does most of the talking—or, maybe *venting* would be a more fitting word. Izuku learns some interesting information; like the fact the Hero Killer was not a member of the League.

Izuku just doesn't understand Shigaraki. Nor the sudden interest the villain his in Stain.

"What makes us different?" Shigaraki muses lightly, fingers tensing around Izuku's neck thoughtfully, "that Hero Killer, and I? Why does he get all the fame and recognition, while we don't get shit? We infiltrated Yuuei High School for fuck's sake, and he gets all the glory for killing a couple Pros?"

"You're nothing alike," Izuku forces out, hoping his voice doesn't betray how afraid he truly is at the mercy of a villain with a powerful Quirk, no Heroes in sight. He's not exactly sure how to answer, can hardly think straight with death hanging over his head, "I... don't understand you, Shigaraki. I don't understand, and I don't accept your actions. It's w-wrong. You're... you're cruel, and ruthless. You want to cause chaos in the world—"

"Izuku," Oboro warns slowly, hovering close to Izuku. He looks ready

to lurch forwards and use their Quirks at a moment's notice, but Izuku knows that'll end worse—Shigaraki had seen the clouds at the USJ; they'd foiled his plans, and pissed him off. Izuku doesn't need the villain knowing they came from him, not when he's already laid in the villain's hands. "Don't... don't piss him off, please be careful about what you say."

"—a-and I don't... I don't accept Stain's actions either. It's wrong too; he was wrong, b-but I understand *why* he did it."

"Oh?" Curiosity curls in the villain's tone, and he turns his face to look at Izuku closer, studying him from the side, "and why *did* he do it? Why understand *him* and not *me*? He and I are the same, Midoriya Izuku."

Oboro sucks in a shuddered breath behind Izuku, but the teen manages to keep his own breathing slow and calm, "Stain didn't destroy because he wanted to," Izuku swallows, "he destroyed in order to try and change the world for the better, um, at least according to his own ideals... I sorta... I respect him a bit. I still don't agree with his means of doing so, b-but, I do understand."

"Respect," Shigaraki snarls out, "he gets respect for killing a bunch of Heroes? Is that what you're saying you understand, little hero? I could do that too, where's my respect?"

"No," Izuku shakes his head instantly, "I respect him for living according to his ideals and not giving up. I respect him trying to... to change the world, even if how he did it was *wrong*. I'll never accept someone taking someone else's life, but I understand him. We... we're more alike than I care to admit. Both of us were inspired by All Might and we're both... we both want to change the world. Stain just took it into his own hands, and lived too narrowly by his ideals. I don't. I see the harm in what he's done, and I- I don't accept it. We're the same, but... but we also couldn't be more *different*."

"I see... All Might," Shigaraki growls the name distastefully, "it always come back to All Might. I hate him, that stuck up piece of shit. I hate that undermining idiot: Stain. And... I hate *you*, disciple. I should've noticed sooner; it's *always* been about All Might."

Izuku's jaw snaps shut, body want to recoil at the villain's words. This is not a very good conversation shift. Izuku already knows Shigaraki hates All Might. It was a bad idea to bring him up.

The villain is quiet for a second, eyes darting around between mall

patrons. Izuku feels Shigaraki tense his arm faintly around his shoulders, and his pointer fingers make rapid taps, middle finger still raised, completely still.

“I’m rather curious about you, disciple,” Shigaraki tells him slowly, “All Might’s personal little brat. I saw how he treated you—spoke to you— at the USJ, it was different from how he treated those other hero-brats. I’d just assumed, at first, that you were one of those dedicated fan boys who worshipped the ground that bastard walks on, and then I saw your freakishly powerful Quirk; infuriatingly powerful, just like his. Still, I thought you were just another hopeless All Might follower trying to be something you’re *not*, but I’m not so sure anymore. Now... that begs the question of: What does that heroic piece of shit see in you?”

“Please,” Oboro whispers, “don’t answer him, Izuku. He’s dangerous. D-don't give him anything else.”

“You’re good, I’ll give you that,” Shigaraki sniffs indifferently, and despite the words coming out almost like a compliment, Izuku can’t help but feel like they’re more so a warning, “you almost managed to hit me; that was... *heroic*. An attempt at saving those useless hero students in that single moment of confusion. I’d probably be a goner if it weren’t for my faithful Nomu taking that hit for me like a good little creature.”

Izuku swallows, willing his heartbeat and breathing to stay on pattern. Shigaraki doesn’t appear to actually be talking to him, just speaking to someone who’s listening.

“And evading my Nomu’s attack... You *should* be dead—” a pause, the villain’s hand tightens around his neck for a few long seconds. Izuku can’t see, but Oboro freezes completely a couple times, so Izuku can only assume Shigaraki’s fifth finger is wavering downwards. “—but you’re not. You survived by the skin of your teeth, disciple. Saved by those... *clouds*.”

The villain growls out the word in disgust, and Oboro tenses, hand hovering just over Izuku’s shoulder. Izuku prays Oboro doesn’t take the unintended bait. Shigaraki can’t know about the Quirk.

Shigaraki seems to shake himself out of his thoughts, head turning faintly to glare at Izuku, “Sensei might not have much interest in you, but I do. I don’t know what All Might sees in you, why he’s so interested in you, Midoriya Izuku, but I plan to find out.”

Izuku stiffens, whole body tensing up. He feels the man's hand close in, and he almost feels that fifth finger ghost over his neck— "Deku!"

The hand around his neck goes slack, but not enough so that Izuku feels confident in breaking away without risking Shigaraki pressing all five fingers down before he's free. Still, he draws in a shaky breath he hadn't known he'd been holding in with that little bit of freedom.

"Deku," Uraraka slows to a stop beside the bench Izuku is held hostage at, slowly taking in the scene with a growing frown and a furrow of her eyebrows, "who's your friend...?"

"Uraraka," Izuku manages to force out lowly, holding back a wince as Shigaraki pulls him in closer, "y-you need to—"

"Oh," the man chirps, tightening his hold even more to the point Izuku can't really breathe. It's a silent warning that Izuku takes to heart, words dying in his throat as he clamps his mouth shut, "man, Midoriya, I didn't realize you were here with friends. My bad, sorry for interrupting your shopping."

All at once the arm around his shoulders is gone, and the fingers threatening his throat disappear along with it. Izuku breathes in a heavy, desperate breath now that he can, one hand coming up to grasp at his own throat. Uraraka moves closer, putting herself almost between Izuku and the man she seems to have decided is probably *not* a friend.

Shigaraki turns to leave, but pauses before he's even a step away, turning to eye the two students before his gaze settles and narrows on Izuku.

"If you know what's good for you, disciple, you won't follow me. I'd hate to think about what all these innocent civilians would do with a villain desperate for escape on the loose," the villain warns easily, voice low and only heard by the two students.

Uraraka shuffles even closer, mouth pressed in a straight line as Shigaraki takes a couple measured steps away from them.

"Shigaraki, wait," Izuku pushes himself up, but doesn't dare take a step towards the villain. Shigaraki pauses, turning towards him in halfhearted interest, one eyebrow cocking in a prompt for the teen to speak, "what is All for One's end game?"

The villain eyes Izuku up and down, gaze crawling down from the

teen's head, to his feet before lifting once again. He shifts, arms crossing loosely over his chest as his gaze settles once more on Izuku's face, "don't know," the villain shrugs, "don't care."

And then he's turning away again, steps finally carrying him away, but not before he looks over his shoulder with that same manic grin he'd worn when Izuku had pieced together his identity, voice calling out casually, but deep and terrifying, "oh, and Midoriya? Take care of yourself. The next time we meet, I *will* kill you. It's no fun if you don't put up a fight."

And then he's gone; disappearing into the crowds.

When Izuku finally catches his breath, heart thundering with adrenaline in his chest. He glances over to see Uraraka already has her phone pressed to her ear; she's talking low and hushed, but Izuku can piece together who she's talking to just from the worried looks she keeps shooting in his direction.

Definitely the police.

"I am so glad you're okay," Oboro wheezes at Izuku's side, hands still hovering around him like he's desperate to touch the teen, "I think I almost had a heart attack."

Yeah, Izuku too.

The police arriving at the mall is a bit of a blur for Izuku.

He's thankful Uraraka takes control the situation, because frankly, Izuku feels like he might black out after the adrenaline starts to wane. Their classmates regroup quite fast, and Izuku assumes it's because of the text Uraraka had sent out—a warning for the class to be on the lookout, but not engage if they happened to spot Shigaraki.

That's what the dispatch officer had told her to do, at least.

It feels like Izuku blinks, and suddenly he's surrounded by worried classmates. He wants to open his mouth and assure them that he's fine, but when he does, no words come out.

He's never felt like this before—never wanted to speak, assure, and not been able to.

He closes his mouth with a stuttered sigh, and lets himself feel

protected by seventeen Heroics students circling around him. They're no match for Shigaraki he knows—none of them are yet, but he still lets himself relax knowing they're watching over him. He trusts his classmates.

The police arrive shortly after they all regroup, the class talking in hushed, worried voices.

Izuku can't force out a description of the villain when asked, even though he *knows* it would greatly help with the search. The police are combing the mall for the villain, but without a description of that they're looking for, it's basically useless. Thankfully, Uraraka manages a decent one in his favor, having seen Shigaraki as well. It's broad, and less detailed than Izuku probably would've been able to give, but he still can't seem to make his voice work.

His heart hammers fearfully in his chest at the thought—he'd never had a problem talking before. Why now? Why does he freeze up every time he *wants* to say something?

"What happens now?" Kirishima asks one of the officers watching over them, the one with a cat Quirk, seriously, hanging by Izuku's opposite side to the one Uraraka hadn't strayed away from.

"We have a Detective involved in the League of Villains case on route. He'd like to ask Midoriya-kun a couple questions, and maybe get a statement from him if he feels up to it. He'll escort Midoriya-kun to the precinct until we can get a hold of his guardians, and the rest of you who were uninvolved in the case will be escorted home by police personnel for safety measure. An officer will inform your guardians of the situation, and we'll ask for contact information in case we need it."

"What about me?" Uraraka asks sharply, eyeing the officer, "I saw him too, shouldn't I go to the station as well?"

"That won't be necessary." Izuku turns his head, and of course, it's Detective Tsukauchi jogging towards them, "we've already gotten your statement, and according to that, you were only around for the tail end of the conversation, right?"

Uraraka frowns, but gives a light nod. The Detective takes it in stride, continuing, "besides, as of now, the safest place for you students to be is home with your guardians. I know you're all Heroics students, but right now, without provisional licenses, you're technically just civilians, and it's our duty to ensure you're all safe and protected."

Tsukauchi flashes a disarming half-smile around the teenagers, “I know you’re all worried about Midoriya, but the safest place for him following this, is at the police station.”

The 1-A students still don’t look particularly pleased at the thought of their classmate going to the station alone, but Tsukauchi seems to anticipate this, taking his hat off and holding it to his chest honestly, “I’ll keep Midoriya safe until his guardians arrive, I promise.”

The students look between one another silently, before all eyes fall onto Izuku, who just tucks closer into himself and nods in agreement. Just the slight bow of his head seems to convince his friends that he’s alright.

Izuku knows that this has more to do with the fact that it’s the League of Villains who’re involved, a direct lead on All for One, than it does statements and procedure—though, to be fair, Izuku can’t find it in himself to recall procedure for something like this. Still, he knows the Detective wants to isolate him from prying peers, and frankly, Izuku is alright with the effort.

“Well... that is pretty safe,” Kaminari frowns, eyeing the Detective, “nothing bad’s gonna happen at the police station... right?”

There’s a murmur of agreement.

“Alright then,” Tsukauchi gives a nod, gesturing Izuku up. The teenager stumbles to his feet and joins the Detective at his side. “You kids sit tight; we’ll have some cars ready to escort you home soon. Please text or call your parents if you haven’t already and let them know what’s happening. Officer Sansa will keep you company until then. We’ll be in touch if we need any additional information from any of you.”

Izuku gives his peers a wave, managing a wavering smile as he turns to follow after the Detective. Oboro is all but pressed against Izuku’s side, not letting any distance come between them as Izuku is escorted out of the mall and guided to a waiting car that Izuku assumes is Tsukauchi's personal vehicle considering it’s not a police car. The ghost is so close, but they also don't touch at all. Oboro must be very conscious of it, because Izuku sure isn't.

The drive is near silent at first. Izuku is sitting in the passenger’s seat, and Oboro had phased into the backseat, leaning along the back of Izuku’s seat almost protectively.

“I’ve already contacted Aizawa, and I’m sure he’s contacted Yamada already too,” Tsukauchi tells the teenager after they’ve stopped at a red light. He glances over briefly before focusing on the road again. “He should be arriving shortly after us, but I’m not sure about Yamada.”

“You didn’t contact All Might first?” Izuku’s surprised that’s when he finds his voice. His tone sounds pretty snappy and spiteful, and it’s really not his intention. Well, *it is*, but he didn’t mean to be quite so forceful. Especially since it’s the first thing he’s said in the last hour.

Tsukauchi glances back over, mouth now pressed into a light frown. He redirected his attention back to the green light overhead, fingers drumming on the steering wheel almost nervously, “I deserve that. I owe you an apology, Midoriya.”

Izuku turns to look at the Detective in surprise.

“I had no right to tell Yagi about your personal situation,” he mutters. “I assumed with One for All, that the two of you were closer than you were. I thought it was something your mentor should know, and I realize now that that wasn’t my decision to make. I apologize for betraying your trust, and inviting someone, who had no right to be a part of your situation, into it. I hope you can find it in yourself to forgive me.”

Izuku stays quiet for a long second, staring out the passenger window. “Did... did All Might put you up to this? I know he felt pretty bad after I talked to him—”

“No,” the Detective lets out a short laugh, shaking his head, “he didn’t put me up to anything. Though he did give me a good scolding for being an idiot after your talk with him. And he was right—*you* were right. I truly am sorry I let my friendship with him impede on my job to serve and protect you. I will not make the same mistake twice.”

Izuku searches the Detective’s face for any dishonesty, and the thought’s a little ironic. Searching someone with a *lie-detector Quirk*’s face for any signs of *dishonesty*. He finds none, not that he expected to find any, so he bows his head in a light nod, “thank you.”

The betrayal’s run deep between the Detective and the Number One Hero, and though Izuku doesn’t completely forgive either man yet, he is grateful they’ve acknowledged they were wrong and apologized for it.

“I should be the one thanking you,” the Detective offers a small smile.

“You definitely should,” Oboro huffs in agreement, breath ghosting over Izuku’s shoulder. “Everyone should count themselves lucky that Midoriya Izuku has such a kind heart.”

The Detective makes idle conversation for the rest of the drive, and when they finally arrive at the police station, Detective Tsukauchi escorts him back into his familiar office, where Izuku recounts the incident with Shigaraki.

Tsukauchi jots down notes as Izuku speaks, but his answers aren’t much different from the statement Uraraka already gave. The whole interaction was no more than ten minutes, and Izuku only really feared for his life a handful of times. He doesn’t remember the majority of his talk with the villain, but he honestly tells the Detective everything he remembers. Some of it is of importance, while the rest of it is inconclusive.

When Izuku’s statement has been collected, the Detective offers for Izuku to relax on the couch pushed against the wall in the back of his office while he waits for his guardians to arrive. He also offers to get Izuku something to drink, but the teenager declines the second offer while taking him up on the first. The couch is plush and comfortable, and Izuku takes the comfort and silence in stride, curling into himself and squeezing his eyes shut in an attempt to calm his raging thoughts.

Oboro sits beside him, close, but not close enough to touch if either of them shifts. He doesn’t say much, is just silent comfort at Izuku’s side. A small part of Izuku knows the ghost is probably seeking comfort, it had to have been traumatic for him as well, but the larger part of Izuku is focusing on not shutting down.

As soon as Izuku sees Shota run into the precinct through Tsukauchi’s office window, attention flicking around the room desperately before landing on the office, Izuku feels his chest seize up like it had just after Shigaraki’s departure.

It feels different this time though.

Despite the past hour of Izuku speaking with the Detective, as soon as he sees his guardian pulling the office door open without so much as knocking, Izuku feels his throat close up. He’d honestly thought he was over the inability to speak, that it was a one time thing, so he’s not sure why his body tenses up and the thought of forcing out any words feels like it physically hurts.

His heart hammers in his chest as Shota stands in the doorway, and Izuku's not sure why tears spring to his eyes when he catches Shota's own anxious gaze. Tears blur his vision, but he still sees his guardian's chest lurching with overexerted breaths, and the only thing that Izuku can think to do in that moment is push himself up and cross the room with wobbly, desperate steps.

"Problem Child," Shota breathes out in relief when he sees the kid in one piece, taking two measured steps into the room to meet Izuku.

Izuku rushes across the room, hardly aware of the Detective standing from his desk to greet the Pro. Izuku pauses in front of his guardian, and Shota's hand hover cautiously at Izuku's sides like he's not quite sure what he should be doing.

Izuku makes the first move for him, closing the space between them as tears collect in the corners of his eyes. He pushes his head close, closing the distance completely as he lets his forehead press against his guardian's sternum. His hands grab fistfuls of Shota's hoodie, and he feels arms lace around his body—one just below his shoulders, and the other cupping his head to Shota's chest.

"You're okay," Shota tells him lowly but gently, holding the teenager securely against himself. The hand not cupping Izuku's head drags slow, even lines up and down his spine, "you're alright, Izuku. It's okay."

Izuku muffles a sob as phantom feelings of fingers ghost across his neck. He buries his face deeper in the material of Shota's hoodie, and feels the man tighten his own hold protectively.

Izuku listens to Shota's soft words, a repeated mantra of '*you're okay*'s' '*I'm here*'s', and '*it's okay*'s'.

He listens to his guardian's pounding heart, and tries to follow the enunciated breathing pattern Shota is drawing in and out for Izuku's sake.

Izuku doesn't know why he's breaking down *now*. Why he physically can't contain the sobs. Why this feels so much different from just after Shigaraki had left. Why he's so desperate to be close to Shota.

He doesn't know why he feels so safe with his guardian's arms wrapped around him, or why the thought of letting Shota go right now makes it feel like he can't *breathe*.

He pushes his face closer, nuzzling his cheek against the soft material of the sweatshirt.

Izuku hears a soft shushing sound as fingers card through his hair.

He faintly hears the sound of a door easing shut, but pays it no mind. He feels himself being guided, and he knows his knees bend and then he's sitting. He's tucked into Shota's side, hugging him, with the man's arm over his shoulder.

Izuku has never felt more like a child, then he does now; clinging to his guardian for comfort in a way he doesn't remember *ever* doing to his mother, but he can't find it in himself to care.

He can't seem to stop crying; he feels so overwhelmed, and he doesn't know why he's suddenly so scared. Why he's *terrified*.

His tongue feels heavy in his mouth and breathing is so *hard*.

He feels Shigaraki's hands on him, phantom but suffocating. He feels pressure around his neck that's not there. Those gruesome images of Asui being turned to dust, and Shota's elbow flaking away swirling with the thought that that could've happened to him—it could've been his throat.

If Shigaraki had more time, or less patience Izuku might not be here right now.

So, he clings to one of the only people who've ever protected him without regard for his own life. He clings to the comfort of his guardian, who's been nothing but helpful, who has time and time again proven himself to be different than every single adult Izuku has ever met in his fifteen years of life before attending Yuuei.

He clings and doesn't let himself think of anything else besides how safe, and comfortable and protected he feels wrapped in his guardian's arms. How Shota holds him just as tightly, face pressed in Izuku's curls.

He doesn't care that he's curled into his teacher's side.

He doesn't care that had this been any other situation, he'd be beside himself at his lack of maturity.

He doesn't care that he's *supposed* to be a hero-in-training.

He listens to Shota telling him that *he'll be okay*. That *he's safe*. He holds onto those soft promises like he clutches at Shota's sweater. He can hardly focus on anything, but that he can hold onto.

Conversation happens around him, soft and hardly audible. Or, maybe he's just not in the state to be picking up on it. Some he retains, but most he doesn't. They talk about him—Tsukauchi mumbles something about Izuku seeming fine; on the drive over, and giving his statement and answering the questions. Shota mumbles something back about panic attacks, and delayed trauma responses.

There's a period of time where he doesn't remember anything—nothing but his guardian's embrace, and then Shota is talking softly, directly to him. The man is promising that Hizashi is on his way, and he doesn't know why until he realizes that he'd been *asking* for him.

When Hizashi arrives with the car, Shota cautiously peels himself away from Izuku's grip. The teen knows he whimpers, grasping desperately, but Shota just helps him up, then tucks him under his arm.

"Take care of him," Tsukauchi's voice sounds worried, and Izuku faintly realizes that he'd broken down completely in the man's office. It's a thought he'll be embarrassed about later, he's sure, but for now he can't care less. Shota grunts in response, leading Izuku out the door.

Tsukauchi follows them through the precinct, shielding away from prying officer's gazes as he walks at the teen's other side. The man pauses when the reach the doors, hesitating. "I didn't know you such a softie, Eraserhead," the Detective mumbles halfheartedly in lieu of a goodbye, and Shota offers nothing but a glare in return.

"C'mon, Kid," Shota says instead of replying to the Detective, voice soft, "'zashi's waiting for us. I think we're all ready to go home, huh?"

Izuku just tucks his face further into the fabric of Shota's sweatshirt, trusting him completely to guide him to the car.

Hizashi is leaning against the door of the car when they finally make it through the sea of vehicles. His arms are crossed tightly over his chest, and one foot taps anxiously.

He sees Oboro already in the backseat of the car, watching but keeping his distance. Izuku wants nothing more than to hug his friend, and he knows Oboro feels the same—it sucks that he has to wait until

they're alone so neither have to worry about any Quirk accidents.

The thought of the ghost being alone, working through this, what Izuku can only assume was equally as traumatic for him as well, alone, has Izuku's already wavering emotions plummeting. Izuku sniffles, wiping his sleeve across his eyes, it's not *fair*.

"Oh, Sunshine," Hizashi breathes out when he sees him, and Izuku's eyes fill with a whole new round of tears and he tears himself away from Shota and all but collapses into Hizashi's waiting arms.

"I was so worried, Sweetheart," Hizashi coos, voice cracking. The blonde-haired man buries his face in Izuku's hair; holding the teenager back as tight as the boy is grasping at him. Izuku's tears have once again turned into sobs. "I'm so glad you're okay. You're okay, baby. I know you're scared, it's okay... You're safe, Izuku, you *are* okay."

Izuku feels Shota step closer, his hand flattening between Izuku's shoulder blades, just above where Hizashi's arms are clutching him tightly. His thumb strokes easy back and forth lines, and Izuku's muscles subconsciously relax under his touch.

Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku sees Shota's other hand on Hizashi's shoulder, giving light, comforting squeezes. "We're all okay," Shota hums softly, tone uncharacteristically gentle. Izuku's not sure if it's for his sake, Hizashi's, or Shota's own—he decides it's probably to appease them all equally.

That night when they get home, Shota and Hizashi don't let Izuku out of their sight.

The three of the curl up on the couch, cuddled together and sharing one big blanket. The cats invite themselves, Nemo purring up a storm pressed against Shota's chest, Blanket making himself comfortable in Izuku's lap under than blanket, and Fish stretched along the back of the couch between Izuku's and Hizashi's heads.

His guardians put on a film that Izuku (Oboro) softly suggests they watch, and the teen hardly makes it twenty minutes in before finally letting his brain shut off, sandwiched between the two people he trusts the most, with the ghost he trusts with his life, sitting in the armchair out of reach of accidental touching.

Izuku's not sure he's ever felt so *safe*.

Chapter End Notes

NGL I really just wanted to write some Dadzawa and his green-bean son after he encounters Shigaraki at the mall. I hope the beginning wasn't to boring, I didn't want to just jump into the mall scene without summarizing the final exams a little.

We're moving on with the anime plot now! I haven't decided whether I'll post the chapter I have half written next, or wait for a while because it's not the bootcamp stuff, but it's based at roughly the same point. We shall see. I wrote like 80% of this chapter from memory, so I know a lot of it won't completely line up with canon. Especially Shiggy and 'zuku talking towards the end. Also I gave Izuku an actual reaction to the encounter with Shiggy because almost dying is traumatic? Also, do you ever just look at your parent/guardian when you're overwhelmed/hurt and almost instantly break down when they show you compassion and comfort, because same :)

Anyways! As always, let me know what you guys think! I adore reading all your comments and seeing what you guys think about this! It always makes my day when I get new comments :) Thank you so much to everyone who's been interacting with this--leaving kudos, or comments or even bookmarking or subscribing! You're all amazing! <3

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

We're back again! Hello!

Terribly sorry this is a bit late! The procrastination was real for this one, but it's done now and I love it! I had a lot of fun with this chapter, but it's a bit of a filler? Ties up some loose ends and it's some scenes I just wanted to write! You guys know how it is :)

Anyways! I hope you enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After the mall incident, Shota and Hizashi keep a close eye on the teenager.

It’s not suffocating, or overbearing like some kids and teens make it out to be when a parent or guardian hovers close, but then again, to Izuku, this is a very different situation.

He’s glad that they’re watching out for him, and grateful that they’re so in tune to his needs. He didn’t even know he needed this—comfort in a way he’s never had before— but he deeply craved it, apparently.

The day following the mall incident, Izuku still hasn’t really found his voice. He’s quiet; doesn't really know how to feel. He’s not sure there even *is* a right way to feel about this.

He knows he’s training to be a Hero, that dangerous and life-threatening situations are essentially the job description of being a Hero, but that doesn’t change the fact that his life had literally hung by one single finger remaining lifted off his neck. He isn’t even a Hero yet, and yet, he’d been so close to dying.

He’d almost *died*—in every sense of the word.

He doesn’t quite know how to wrap his head around it.

Shota and Hizashi don’t push him for answers, or crowd him. They let Izuku come to them first, and to Izuku’s own genuine surprise, he *does*.

He finds himself seeking them out. Gravitating towards the two of

them—it's like a subconscious pull he's never felt before. A yearning need to be with someone he knows will keep him safe. Shota and Hizashi are those people. They are *safe*.

He wants to be close to them. He wants to be tucked under Shota's arm, and squeezed in a tight hug from Hizashi. He doesn't want to let them out of his sight, because something about looking at them, seeing them across the room, or across the table, *calms* him down.

It's almost ridiculous, really. He'd been by himself for so long, he'd been the only person he could trust for so long, and yet here and now, he's searching for something foreign to him. Comfort.

And his guardians just seem to take it in stride.

Hizashi doesn't hesitate to wrap Izuku in a hug, or hold him close. And Shota doesn't even bat an eyelash when it comes to tucking the teen close into his side. Shota, Izuku has noticed, seems to have a talent of reading Izuku's facial expressions; he seems to always know when Izuku is anxious, or panicking, or when he just needs a hug or proximity.

He never says anything— doesn't point it out— but he never fails to provide exactly what Izuku needs, even if Izuku doesn't know what he needs himself. Hizashi is also quite good at this—can take one look at Izuku and often *softens* before asking what he needs.

Izuku's not used to this, but he's very grateful it's there. He's not sure how he would've coped alone in his old apartment had things turned out differently and his teachers not taken him in.

It's not just his guardians who keep close—Oboro had jumped on Izuku the second he was in his room with the door shut. It was comforting to squeeze someone who squeezed him back just as tight. Shota and Hizashi gave him hugs and comfort, but it was different to clutching desperately at Oboro and having him clutch back.

They were equals—friends. And they'd both been there when Izuku's life had been threatened. They'd both heard the words exchanged, and feared for Izuku's life. Oboro had watched, unable to do anything more than be there.

Tears had welled in Izuku's eyes as he grabbed fistfuls of the back of Oboro's Yuuei blazer jacket, and the ghost had returned the sentiment, clutching at Izuku's sweater, arms shaking and tensing as he held the younger teen closer.

They stood like that for a while, wrapped in each other's arms and shaking with shared fear. Izuku had hooked his chin over Oboro's shoulder, and the ghost had turned his head to bury his nose in the junction of Izuku's neck.

Izuku had been just as desperate and antsy to envelope Oboro in a hug as he had been his guardians, and he honestly wishes he could've instantly wrapped the ghost in a hug, for both of their sakes. It's hard to have such a close friend, but not be able to revel in such ordinary things like hugs and comfort, like everyone else seems to.

It's torture to see his friend so close to breaking, *struggling*, and not being able to do anything instantly because there's people around. Izuku absolutely hates it, and he knows Oboro is on the same page.

So, they take that time enclosed in Izuku's room, Shota and Hizashi just outside the door and down a hallway in the kitchen, and they hug. Clutch each other close. Cry. And it's probably the most relief Izuku's felt since feeling the villain's fingers encircling his throat, despite how he'd clung to his guardians all evening.

That night, after Shota and Hizashi have checked in on him and retired to their own room for the night with a hope of actually sleeping, Oboro been strange, and hesitant, and Izuku felt the same way.

He'd offered for the ghost to share the bed with him, but, like usual, Oboro had been hesitant. He was still cold, but Izuku had something to counter it. The teen had dug out the heated blanket that Hizashi had brought home for him.

Only when Izuku was tucked under the heated blanket and his own blankets as well, did Oboro finally agree to lie beside Izuku. It's the first time that the two of them shared Izuku's bed, both just craving the proximity of it. Izuku felt immensely comforted by the fact he wasn't alone, even if his company was a ghost, and Oboro, for the first time in over thirteen years, had even drifted in and out of a fitful sleep.

The blanket was the first piece of heated equipment his guardians had bought for him, purchased that first day Izuku had asked to make adjustments to his costume in an attempt to counter the cold.

Unbeknownst to Izuku, Shota had asked Hizashi to stop by the mall on his way home from Yuuei when Izuku had fallen asleep at the man's side.

The dark-haired man had really taken the Hosu-and-Quirk-scare-hypothermia-incident to heart, and had even connected the dots between Recovery Girl's off-handed comment of Izuku's below average temperature and the Quirk.

It was a nice thought, but night was one of the only times Izuku tended to overheat—he was a sucker for fuzzy blankets. Still, having the electric blanket in hand that night after Hizashi had returned home, honestly overwhelmed at the genuine thought his guardians had put into his problem after nothing more than an innocent comment from him, had him feeling all soft and squishy inside.

Following the blanket, the heated jacket that Izuku often found himself wearing out in public arrived in the mail. It was comfortable, and warm. The jacket was rechargeable, and despite the wiring hidden in the fabric, it was fairly lightweight and flexible—which had given Izuku hope for his heated Hero Costume design. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that the jacket was quite *pricey* (Izuku tried not to think about *that*), but if a company could make something as good as the jacket was, he was excited to see what Power Loader and his Support Course class could come up with Yuuei's labs and funds.

It had been just a week and a half until he'd had his new Hero Costume in hand, and man, was that cool! He'd stared in awe at the finished prototype for *at least* a full minute.

It hadn't changed much in design, but it felt different.

The cold absorption technology, curtesy of one Hatsume Mei, was a deep green, flexible, leathery sort of fabric that really did absorb the cold. The wires hidden away inside the fabric were small and compact, Izuku hardly even felt them in the suit.

He truthfully didn't understand exactly how it worked—his general idea for it had been vague, but somehow, Hatsume had made it work.

Wearing it didn't even feel like he was wearing anything heated—which was a concern he'd had because he didn't want to overheat if Todoroki, Oboro or the vestiges weren't around.

Heroics was a physically hard class, and they sweat. A lot. He didn't want a costume that will warm him up even when he's already hot. Heat stroke is almost as bad as hypothermia.

"We thought of that too," Power Loader had given a sure nod when Izuku had brought the thought up, "There's a thermometer gage in the

cuff of your sleeve that'll constantly read your core body temperature and it will only activate the heater when your temperature drops lower than the inputted danger temperature—"

"Oh! And there's also a force activation switch hidden in the collar of the costume too!" Hatsume, who was also taking part in the meeting, rightfully so considering how much she'd helped with the new costume, had chirped excitedly, "I trust my babies to do their jobs, but you can never go wrong with a failsafe! It's activated by your DNA, and only your DNA, Midoriya-kun, making contact with the sensor plate, so it can't be used against you out in the field!"

"Right," Power Loader sighs, rubbing at the back of his neck. "Well, just Midoriya's DNA thus far. We can add additional accepted DNA overrides to the sensor in case Midoriya-kun is incapable of force starting his own suit for any reason. If that's something you're interested in, at least. Since it's a matter of core temperature and the body will start shutting down incredibly fast if the temperature doesn't raise quickly, it's good to have trusted friends and fellow Heroes who can activate the suit if all goes wrong."

"That's a good idea," Shota gives a nod, "I'll be requesting a couple precautionary overriders, such as myself and a few other teachers, but besides that, I'm sure Midoriya has some people in mind as well."

"Sure," Power Loader gives the man a knowing nod, before shooting the teen a crooked smile, "better safe than sorry when it comes to something like this. The more people Midoriya has who can help him in a pinch, the better."

Shota gives a responding nod, but looks a bit distracted by his own thoughts. "Any other differences from the old costume?"

"Oh! Yes!" Hatsume continued, unfazed by the halfhearted glance of exhaustion from her teacher, "the suit will also always be charged! Any source of cold will charge it; external temperature, Todoroki-kun's icy side, a shock of cold; like falling in ice water, or standing in an industrial freezer!"

"An industrial freezer?" Shota cocked an eyebrow, but the girl didn't seem to hear him. Power Loader just offers a shrug when he catches the underground Hero's eyes.

"It's also waterproof! The fabric has been sprayed with an almost plastic spray of sorts that's also completely flexibly and won't interfere with your mobility. It's completely hydrophobic, which will protect

the internal workings!”

Hatsume had flashed a wide, almost manic, grin when the boy had stared down at the new costume in his hands. She bounced on her heels and urged him to try it on so they could see if the sizing was correct, even though the sizing they used was the exact same as his previous costume that had been a little on the bigger and baggier side.

The new costume fit is even better than the first.

It wasn’t skin tight, but it also wasn’t as baggy. It was a perfect middle ground, and Izuku was sure it would be perfect for allowing some breathe room during the grueling training and that the tight fit would encase the warmth when he needed it. It was damn near perfect. Izuku couldn’t find anything wrong with the design, inner workings or anything.

They’d tested it first with Todoroki’s ice side, under Shota’s intense and watchful eye.

And it worked.

At first, it didn’t appear to be working. Todoroki encased Izuku in a cave of ice, and Oboro, interested in the outcome but also completely worried, had joined him in the cave. He didn’t dare touch Izuku, but just his proximity was enough to make the air colder.

And it had been very cold for a moment, he’d almost started to shiver, eyes locked on the little thermostat in his cuff. As soon as his temperature dropped to the set number of activation Shota had insisted on, warmth instantly flooded Izuku’s body. It was a relief—he could see his breath before him and his cheeks and nose felt cold, but his body was blissfully warm.

“Woah,” Oboro had studied the costume with an impressed look. He leans over Izuku’s shoulder, watching the thermostat on his wrist as Izuku himself studies it, “that Support Course girl is crazy cool, but kinda scary. Your temperature’s already gone up two degrees— it’s already almost back to normal temperature.”

Izuku just grinned, nodding in agreement as he called for Todoroki to melt away his confined.

As soon as he was in sight, a pleased smile on his face, Shota’s own face of worry melted away to his usual neutral expression, “good results I take it?”

“I should send Power Loader and Hatsume a thank you card!”

Besides the added features, the suit didn’t move or work any differently than his first one. It was easy getting used to because for the most part, the only things that had changed were automatic things —and even when they were activated, they hardly affected him. The heated wires were so subtle he sometimes didn’t even feel them turning on to regulate his temperature.

The changes were tiny enough that most of his classmates didn’t even notice the updated costume.

He didn’t want his class to know of his inability to retain heat when it came to his Quirk, so the only two classmates who were informed of the changes, due to concerns, were: Todoroki, obviously, the classmate who’d helped test the new design, and Iida, who’d been there for the Hosu incident and knew he’d almost died—though, neither knew *how* he’d almost died past the mysterious hypothermia.

Izuku didn’t want a bunch of people knowing and babying him. He was still a Hero-in-training, and with his new costume, he had little to be worried about. He just knows that even if his classmates don’t mean to be condescending and overly cautious when it comes to his wellbeing, they will be. They’re a tight knit group, and he’s seen how worried they get when anyone misses a day for whatever reason.

The overflow of support and caution can be overwhelming, however unintentional it may be.

So it’s kept on the downlow.

That said, the majority of the teachers know and are given signs to watch out for from Recovery Girl herself—it doesn’t really change anything, but he does notice them keeping a closer eye on him.

“So, what can he do?”

Izuku looks up from the textbook in his lap, staring at Hitoshi with wide, startled eyes, “what?”

It’s Monday after school, and Izuku had brought Hitoshi home with him for a study session. It’s the first person besides his guardians that he’s seen since his almost death with Shigaraki, but it feels very good, *normal*, to talk to a friend—an unassuming party who doesn’t really know what happened.

He likes having a friend he can invite over, and it's even better considering that Hitoshi is completely comfortable in the apartment too, considering he'd spent a lot of his childhood in the apartment, and that Izuku's guardians were his uncles.

"Ro," the other teen shrugs, spinning his pencil between his fingers as he watches Izuku. Oboro, who is sitting in the corner of Izuku's bed, part of the conversation, but not at the same time, watches. He's curled into a small ball and pressed between the wall and Izuku's pillows. The ghost lets out a quiet hum of interest. "What does he do?"

"What... what do you mean?" Izuku cocks his head, glancing back at the ghost before refocusing on Hitoshi. The purple-haired boy pauses to write down an answer on his worksheet.

"Like, I know he fiddles with lights and stuff. I've seen that. He's been doing that since before you started living here; scares the absolute shit outta 'zashi. He can *obviously* levitate books, I saw that too—but like, what else? Does he have any ghost talents? Is there anything cool he can do?"

"My whole existence is cool," Oboro pouts.

"I'm... not sure?" Izuku glances back at the ghost for real now, and Oboro looks just as curious as Izuku feels. "As far as I know, the light stuff has always happened—I mean I just met him his year, right? But the book... that's... I don't know. It's pretty new, I guess."

"It is definitely new," Oboro chimes in.

Hitoshi is quiet for a moment, studying Izuku. The green-haired boy taps his pencil anxiously against his English homework, waiting for Hitoshi to speak, "how do you... play into it?"

Oboro straightens up behind Izuku and he hears the near silent rustling of the ghostly Yuuei uniform as he crawls across the bed and plops down on the edge to me a more involved part of the conversation, "he's already on to you, Izu. You should tell him."

"I can't," Izuku swallows, glaring down at his worksheet.

"I get the feeling you're not talking to me," Hitoshi hums softly, his own eyes dropping back to his own English assignment.

"You can," Oboro shrugs, continuing as if Hitoshi hadn't said anything. "He already knows half of it, what's the problem with him

knowing just a little bit more? Trust someone, Izuku. Preferably someone who's *not* a ghost. You need allies."

There's the problem that Hitoshi might know Oboro's Quirk—might *know* Oboro when he has more information. He'd been there when Oboro had accidentally used his Quirk during the Sports Festival. He'd seen the clouds; he'd been trapped in the clouds just as Izuku had.

It's safe to assume Hitoshi had probably met Oboro when he was alive—or at least been told of him, or seen his face at some point or another. Oboro would've been fifteen or sixteen the year that Izuku and Hitoshi were born, so he would've died around the time Hitoshi was two or three if Izuku's math is correct.

It's one thing for Hitoshi to keep a random ghost that Izuku sees a secret from his uncles, but it's another entirely for Izuku to ask that he keep his uncles' dead best friend who's lingering around in ghost form a secret from them.

Still, Hitoshi is *smart*. He's smart like Shota—he's got quick wit and he's perceptive. He'll make a great underground Hero when he's finally transferred into the Heroics classes.

"I think... that the ghosts can use my energy," Izuku thinks his words through very carefully. He's cautious not to give too much away, or mention anything about Quirks. He's finally on good terms with Hitoshi, he doesn't want to ruin it by having his friend think he'd somehow cheated during the festival.

"They... wait, really?" Hitoshi perks up in interest, "how does that work?"

Izuku shrugs, tucking his hands in his lap, "w-well, he couldn't... do much before, but after I started living here too and we became friend and started spending time together, he started being able to interact more. Like, he, um, he pushed a plate, and then he was able to turn the pages of a book when it was open on the desktop with-with extreme concentration. N-now he can hold the books and pick stuff up briefly..."

"What else can he do?" Hitoshi furrows his eyebrows, leaning back against the side of the bed. He narrowly missed phasing through Oboro's legs, but just because the ghost squawks and throws himself to the side.

Izuku snorts a laugh, which earns him a confused glance from Hitoshi

and a heated glare from Oboro. “Sorry,” he says to the room—not really directed at either for his outburst, and honestly, he’s not sorry in the slightest.

Izuku forces himself back to the conversation at hand, biting his lip. “I’m not entirely sure,” he frowns, “we haven’t tested much. There’s been... a lot going on recently”

“You can say that again,” Oboro huffs, sinking to the floor and sitting crisscross beside Izuku, a safe distance away from Hitoshi.

“Yeah, with all those villain attacks, right? Uncle Sho’s been a bit high strung when it comes to your class. The USJ incident and then you had those internships after the Sports Festival—man, you Heroics class kids are so lucky. Internships with Pros and watching real fights—we don’t do anything cool in GenEd.”

Izuku’s not sure Hitoshi has a real grasp of just how hard the Heroics course really is, but that’s a lesson only learned when you’re a *part* of it and dropped into the brunt of Hero work first hand. He can tell him everything, preach about the dangers and the not so nice aspects, but until you experience it, you’ll never quite understand. So, for now he just nods slowly.

“Yeah,” Izuku clears his throat, “but, um, just quite recently we discovered that he can sleep. We’re not entirely sure how it happened, why it happened, but he hasn’t been able to since he... y’know.”

“Really?” Hitoshi’s head cocks in interest, “that’s cool. What other sorts of tests do you want to run?” Izuku shakes himself from his thoughts, gaze shooting to Hitoshi. “Maybe we can do some of them?”

“Well...” Izuku bites his lip, “I’ve been wondering for a while if he can drink or eat anything when I’m around— I think that the longer we’re in proximity and the more he keeps trying, the easier it’ll come to him. The... ah, the stronger he’ll become. I think that’s why he was able to... sleep for a little bit.”

“I’ve never tried to eat,” Oboro puckers his lips thoughtfully, “seemed pointless when I couldn’t even touch anything— but do you know what I’d give to actually eat? I’d give my— well, actually, I don’t really have anything else to give besides my soul, and I’d quite like to keep that.”

“You’re so weird,” Izuku huffs out, glancing at Hitoshi so the purple-haired teen knows he’s not talking about him. “He says he’s game to

try.” A pause, where Izuku bites his lip before shrugging, “more or less that’s what he said, at least.”

“Good,” Hitoshi gives a nod, “that first test is easy enough then,” Hitoshi nods to himself, pushing himself up off the floor and waiting for Izuku to do the same. He does, with a cocked eyebrow and a silent question in his eyes. Hitoshi leaves the room without really waiting for Izuku or Oboro to follow—the two exchange a glance before following along.

The living room and kitchen are empty when they arrive, and Hitoshi takes no time to shuffle towards the cabinet and grab a glass. He swats at Blanket before the cat can reach up and grab at his butt, clearly well versed with the cat’s antics.

He fills the glass of water and sets in on the table before crouching beside the snack cupboard and digging around. When he pulls his hand back, Izuku notes a box of Pocky that the other teen quickly tears into. He rips open the packaging inside, and steals one for himself. He munches on the stick as he offers the package to Izuku, who also takes one before Hitoshi sets it on the table beside the water.

He eyes his offering with a nod before turning back to Izuku, lips quirking up faintly in a smile, “I hope Ro likes chocolate and water.”

“He did,” Oboro nods solemnly, eyeing the chocolate coated biscuit sticks with a longing look. “I love chocolate.”

Izuku has half a mind to reach over and pat Oboro’s shoulder, but he doesn’t want to interfere with the tests yet. Maybe they can do a secondary test later, if this one doesn’t work, when it’s just the two of them—that way if Oboro accidentally uses his Quirk, Izuku doesn't have to think of a way to explain it.

“Are you sure we should be doing this now...?” Izuku asks quietly, looking around the room even though he knows his guardians aren’t in the main living area. Shota isn’t even home, but Hizashi is. “What if Hizashi walks out and sees a levitating glass of water?”

“Then we ask if he’d like some water too,” Hitoshi cocks his head, lips pursed along with his teasing tone. “Assuming we get to the point where he can hold it, I’m sure Ro could deliver a drink to him, eh?”

“Or,” Oboro chimes in unhelpfully, “if he asks if he just saw a floating glass of water, you hit him with a ‘*no you didn’t.*’ and walk away. That’ll leave him reeling—you saw what that tactic did to ‘toshi here.”

“I swear,” Izuku groans softly, dragging his palms down his face, “it’s like you two share one braincell. Being in your guys’ company is like being friends with *monkeys*... You two are the worst at excuses.”

“One to talk,” Oboro snorts out, leaning against the table.

“Wait, what did Ro say?” Hitoshi’s lips split into a small smile, glancing around the room in interest.

“Nothing helpful,” Izuku sighs heavily after shooting the ghost a glare, “Hizashi’s too smart for a ‘*no you didn’t*’ to work on him.”

“But... isn’t that... exactly what you did to me? Try to make me think it didn’t happen—which it obviously did, and all you really did was make me think I was losing my mind. Plus, I think if anyone shares a singular braincell, it’s you and Ro. Can’t change my mind.”

“We’re getting off track,” Izuku rubs at the back of his neck as a light flush dusts over his freckled cheeks. “I don’t want Hizashi to know at all—shouldn't we do this somewhere else?”

“Relax, Izuku,” Hitoshi plops down in one of the dining table chairs, “’zashi is in their room, probably picking out some songs for his show on Friday. He’ll have headphones on, and it’s not like he’ll hear us talking down a whole hallway and living room away—his hearing isn’t that great.”

“Are you sure?” Izuku asks meekly, still looking back over his shoulder as if Hizashi will suddenly appear behind them as if summoned.

“Definitely,” Hitoshi nods, fingers drumming on the table top before he reaches over to snag another Pocky. “We’re safe to experiment.”

Izuku finally allows a tiny nod, not completely content with the thought of doing an experiment involving floating materials in the kitchen where his guardian could literally walk in at any time—not to mention the fact Shota hadn’t given a specific returning time when he’d slumped out of the apartment on his way to the police station where Detective Tsukauchi had requested his personal assistance with a case.

“Okay,” Hitoshi give a second, more pronounced nod, looking at Izuku first, then the other two empty chairs pushed in around the table. Izuku doesn’t have the heart to tell the other teen that Oboro is stood at Hitoshi’s side, close to the snack and water, not seated at the table.

“Let’s start easy, Ro, try’n pick up one of the Pocky sticks.”

“With pleasure!” the ghost grins wide, clearly excited if the blinding, squinty-eyed smile is anything to go off. The ghost doesn’t sit down in front of the snack, just leans over it, one hand planted on the table for support as the other hovers over the snack with a look of intensity.

His first attempt at grabbing the Pocky is a failure. He goes right through both the Pocky and the table. The second, he manages to grasp and lift, but it slips through his fingers and drops the tiny distance back down.

Hitoshi, despite this being his idea, and knowing there’s a ghost with them, having *seen* a book levitating in Izuku’s room, startles as the Pocky moves, drawing in a surprised gasp. His eyes don’t leave the package of Pocky.

The third attempt is like the second, where he manages to get a grip, lift slightly, but it falls through shortly after. The distance of the drop was enough to make the biscuit snap into two when it hits the table. Oboro lets out a groan, glaring between the two pieces.

The fourth attempt is when things finally start happening.

The ghost’s concentration is sharply focused on the chocolate side of the treat (figures Oboro would go for that side). His tongue is poked out in concentration like it has been when the ghost was learning how to turn the pages of books. He pinches at the air, like he psyching himself up to grab it. He reaches down suddenly and snags the piece of Pocky, lifting up with a wince like he’s afraid it’ll fall through his fingers.

It doesn’t.

Hitoshi shifts slightly away from the floating piece of Pocky as Oboro gets his grip right and holds the snack in his hand. He stares down at it like it’s a foreign concept—and after over thirteen years of not touching anything, let alone *eating*, Izuku assumes it probably is pretty foreign.

“What now?” Oboro asks dumbly, wide, almost nervous gaze shooting to Izuku for guidance.

Izuku flounders for a second—he hadn’t expected to get this far, “um,” he shrugs, looking between Hitoshi and Oboro, “t-take a bite?”

Oboro wrinkles his nose before he huffs out an embarrassed sort of laugh, “oh yeah, right. A bite. Thanks, I... I don’t know how I’d forget that part.”

Oboro stares down at the Pocky for a moment before exhaling slowly. He lifts the snack to his mouth and pauses again, suddenly looking unsure. His gaze shoots back to Izuku, Pocky stick held up in front of his face.

There’s a silent question in his eyes, desperate, and Izuku voices it aloud to all of them, “what happens if it doesn’t work?” The green-haired teen bites hard at his lip, letting the sharp pain ground him, “what... what happens if it *does* work?”

Hitoshi is quiet for a second as the questions sink in, and Oboro is faltering.

“If it works,” the purple-haired teen starts slowly, looking around the room, “it’ll be a successful experiment. It’s not like he can... die all over again, right? There’re no *negative* outcomes I can see. It’s an innocent test.” Izuku sure hopes ghosts can’t die all over again, but a new fear settles in his chest, “and if it doesn’t, no big deal. We would’ve tried, and nothing happened. Not all experiments are successful, and this is uncharted territory for *all* of us.”

Oboro had been watching Hitoshi, but he glances back over at Izuku when the teen is finished, “should... I try?”

Izuku swallows, but nods. He really is curious—and no one’s ever heard of a ghost dying twice. There’s virtually nothing that could go wrong; Hitoshi’s right. It either happens, or it doesn’t.

Oboro gives a suddenly determined nod and glares down at the piece of Pocky like he’s gearing up for a battle... against a chocolate covered biscuit stick. He lifts it the remaining distance to his mouth and takes a tiny bite. It’s really just the chocolate on the end of the stick.

Izuku almost snorts at the baby bite he takes, and Hitoshi does hide a smile behind his hand as he watches with interest.

The purple-haired teen, who only sees a floating piece of Pocky and not the entity eating it, looks around the piece of Pocky in the air before looking at Izuku with wide, amazed eyes, “did he bite it, because I don’t see the end of it anymore? That was the weirdest thing I think I’ve ever seen. It’s just—it was there one second and gone the next.”

Izuku nods slowly, attention back on Oboro who's eyebrows are furrowed in confusion. He chews slowly, as his mouth curls downwards in an uncertain look. He stares at the Pocky before taking another bite, slightly bigger.

"I don't taste anything," he tells Izuku, fiddling with the remaining Pocky clutched in his fingers. He shifts, mouth pursed as he lets out a 'huh' noise. Izuku cocks his head in question, and Oboro continues, one eyebrow quirked as he studies the remaining Pocky, "I have absolutely no idea where that just went."

"Well?" Hitoshi leans forward, elbows and forearms supporting him, "what's the verdict? I'm on the edge of my seat."

"He doesn't taste it," Izuku relays, his own head cocked in interest, "and he doesn't know where it went. There's... nowhere for it to go, he um, he doesn't have a solid form, so I don't think he technically has a stomach?"

"So, it just..." Hitoshi narrows his eyes at the hovering piece of Pocky, "it just *disappeared* into thin air?"

Izuku gives a slow nod as he eyes Oboro. The ghost takes another bite, a pout on his lips, "I know these are delicious, and not tasting it is torture. This is torture, 'zuku."

"I'm sorry," Izuku huffs a laugh, "it for the sake of science though. You're fine—I mean you could've died all over again, right? Consider yourself lucky."

"What?" Hitoshi lets out in confusion as he blinks in Izuku's direction, at the same time Oboro lets out a groaned moan of: "Science *sucks*. And some sympathy would be nice!"

"Nothing," Izuku tells his living friend, looking away from the theatrically pouting ghost, "he's just being dramatic. He's upset he couldn't taste the chocolate."

"I'm a ghost, let me have that!" Oboro whines, which just makes Izuku laugh more. "You're so mean, Izu-chan!"

Hitoshi's mouth quirks up like he wants to ask a question, but he seems to think better of it, and shakes his head. "Was that... a failure or a success?"

"I don't know," Izuku breaths out honestly, "I mean, he successfully

ate it, I guess? But he couldn't taste it, and it's just... gone now? Does that count as eating?"

Hitoshi gives a heavy, unsure shrug, "I don't know."

"Do you think I can get a stomachache without a real stomach if I eat too many of these?" Oboro asks, and when Izuku looks back up to him, the original piece of Pocky is gone, and he's holding two other pieces; one with a large bite taken out of it.

"Do you really want to test that theory?" Izuku leans against the table in interest as Oboro freezes. He stares down at the snack distrustfully.

Hitoshi looks back to the Pocky package, prompted by Izuku's words, and curses under his breath in surprise at the two levitating pieces. "I'm not sure I'll ever get used to that, man."

Oboro stares helplessly at the Pocky in his hand, chomping the piece he'd taken a bite of before guiltily eating the second stick in two big bites as well, "take these away from me, before I eat them all. I don't want to test that theory."

Izuku laughs as he follows orders, tugging the package to sit between Hitoshi and himself. He takes one of the sticks and bites it. Oboro is still chewing his own mouthful of Pocky, a pout on his lips as he stares longingly at the package across the table.

Hitoshi frowns at the Pocky beside him, eyeing the package like it's been infected by ghost. Izuku opens his mouth the tell him they're fine, but before he can, Hitoshi gives a light shrug to himself and selects his own piece, biting it without another thought.

"What about the water?" the purple-haired teen asks around his bite of Pocky.

Izuku also turns to the glass of water, watching as Oboro frowns down at it.

"Bottoms up, I guess?" the ghost shrugs after a second, grabbing the glass and lifting it to his mouth.

Hitoshi startles at his side at the quick, not vocally telegraphed by Izuku, movements of the glass of water. Oboro jolts in his own surprise at Hitoshi moving so suddenly.

Two things happen in rapid succession—

First, Oboro barely gets any water in his mouth, making a noise like he's almost drowning in what does make it into his mouth, as the rest of the sloshing liquid splashes onto his Yuuei uniform and splatters on the ground.

The second thing to happen, is the glass phasing through his hands and promptly shattering on the floor. Both boys startle at the sound, and Izuku even springs to his feet. Water pools around the bottoms of his bare feet, but he doesn't move any further than that.

"Oh my God!" Oboro gasps, and Izuku isn't sure if it's because he's wet, he spilled the water, or because he'd shattered a glass, "I'm so sorry! I did *not* mean to do that!"

"Maybe... um," Hitoshi looks around the room guiltily, "maybe a *glass* wasn't the best call. My bad."

Izuku might've huffed a laugh if he weren't deafened by his own racing heartbeat rushing through his ears. He barely hears the pounding, hurried footsteps coming from down the hallway. Not even a second later a surprised Hizashi rounds the corner, freezing abruptly as he takes in the scene.

Hizashi surveys over the damage before drawing in a breath. He eyes the shattered glass and spilled water, but says nothing on the matter. Izuku's not sure if he's worried the man is upset with them, or happy he's glossing over it for now. "Are either of you hurt?"

Hitoshi shakes his head, and Izuku frowns to himself before repeating the gesture.

"Okay. Neither of you move," Hizashi demands from the doorway before spinning and disappearing. He returns no more than five seconds later, now in a pair of shoes. He's also holding a broom. Izuku opens his mouth to offer to clean it up, they had broken it after all, but as soon as he goes to take a step, Hizashi points at him like he'd read his while character in just one glance, "don't move, Kiddo. There's glass everywhere."

"I'm so sorry," Oboro whines from the other side of the room.

"It was an accident, uncle 'zashi," Hitoshi frowns, not moving from his seat. The only thing he does is draw his knees up for his feet and legs are out of the way. "Sorry."

"I know," Hizashi nods, looking between the two of them, "you know

I'm not mad. I just don't want either of you getting hurt—you're both barefoot. Sunshine, why don't you take a seat and I'll sweep the glass up?"

Izuku silently obeys, plopping back down into his seat and drawing his legs up to a similar position to Hitoshi. Anxiety pulses through his veins as he tucks in on himself—they'd broken Shota and Hizashi's glass doing an experiment. He feels so bad—and to make matters worse, Hizashi is cleaning it up.

Hizashi breaths a quiet sigh of relief as Izuku plops down, and it's as fast as the exhale leaves his lips that he's stepping closer to sweep up the chunks of glass. They're everywhere—shattered into random sizes. It takes a second for the man to get most of the bigger pieces swept up and dropped in the trash.

Following that he grabs the mop with another demand for them to stay seated.

The water and little shards of glass are mopped away, and when Hizashi finally deems it clean, they're allowed to move. Neither boy does just yet.

"I'm sorry," Izuku mumbles as Hizashi sets the mop aside. The blonde raises an eyebrow, frowning between the two teens. "We just—it-it slipped and I should've cleaned it up, because it was my m-mess, but you *did* and, and, I'm sorry for bothering you because I-I know you're busy and you were working and—"

"It's alright, Izuku," Hizashi tells him softly, reaching over to ruffle his fingers through deep green locks, "it was an accident, yeah? That's okay. I'd rather deal with the glass anyways; I'd hate for either of you little listeners to get cut! Besides, bare feet and glass shards do not mix well."

"Y-you really don't mind?" Izuku asks cautiously, fiddling with his own fingers.

"Nah," Hizashi insists with a wave of his hand, "we've got plenty of glasses. It's all alright, Lil' Listener. No harm done."

"It's not the first glass to be broken around here," Hitoshi tells Izuku as he finally unfolds from the chair, feet planting on the floor. He pauses for a second as a wry smile curls onto his lips, "I mean, one time a glass fell right off the table like a... a *ghost* or something had pushed it."

Oboro glares at the teen, who's innocently glancing around the room, "that—" the ghost deflates where he's standing. His teeth click together as he shuts his mouth, bottom lip jutting out in a pout as his eyes steadying on Izuku, "that was also an accident. I definitely did *not* push it! I don't even know how I hooked onto that— and! And, to be fair, Hitoshi left it on the very edge. Totally not my fault!"

"Yeesh," Hizashi sighs heavily, scratching lightly at his scalp before running his fingers back through his hair, "don't remind me about that, Kiddo. Sho still *insists* it was one of the cats, even though I don't even think any of them were even in the room. Honestly, I still think it was just nudged or something."

"Or something," Hitoshi huffs under his breath, shooting Izuku a knowing look. "Definitely or something."

Hizashi raises an amused eyebrow at Hitoshi's antics before letting out a quiet laugh, "anywaysss, I'll leave you two to your own devices since you're both fine! Shota'll be home sometime soon, but you know where to find me if you need me. Give me a shout if either of you end up bleeding, or unconscious."

"You and uncle Sho are literally the two weirdest dudes I've even known," Hitoshi's face is contorted in disbelief at Hizashi's words. "Who says stuff like that?"

"Yeah, well, when you deal with Heroic teenagers for a living, you learn to cut to the chase, ya'dig?" Hizashi lets out a hearty laugh, both hands coming up to ruffle through green and purple hair, "holler if ya need me!"

Izuku leans into the touch while Hitoshi bows away from it. The purple-haired teenager has a halfhearted scowl directed at Hizashi, while Izuku manages a light smile as the man finally pulls away and leaves them in the kitchen.

Hitoshi huffs out a heavy sigh, slumping back against his chair as he grabs another piece of Pocky, "was that a successful experiment, at least?"

"I think I almost drowned!" Oboro chirps from across the table. The ghost pauses, looking down at his clothes with a heavy frown before he pinches the fabric and pulls it away from his body, "and I'm wet."

Izuku's face pinches into a frown, "I'd say no."

“Hey, if I can get wet like this, do you think I’d be able to *shower*?”

…

Could a ghost shower?

Tuesday after school, Hitoshi comes home with Izuku once again. Neither guardian even bats an eyelash at the fact their nephew is following their foster son around like a puppy—honestly, both are just glad each boy has a friend.

They don’t have homework to do today, having finished it that lunch period with the rest of their group of friends. They really hadn’t had much to begin with, most of their classes had been assignment based with homework being to make sure the assignment was complete for the next class.

Izuku’s not entirely sure what their plan is when they trail into the apartment together after walking to the train station with Iida and Uraraka and catching a train home, but Hitoshi had assured the green-haired teen that he had one.

And he did.

“Uncle ‘zashi?” Hitoshi prompts innocently, when they step into the apartment, leading Izuku and Oboro into the kitchen where Hizashi was making a grocery list. They’d offered to bring the two boys home, but they’d decided to spend a bit more time with their friends.

“Whaddup, Kiddo?” the man hums in return, not even looking towards them as he searches through the cabinet.

“Could we use your game console?” Hitoshi asks sweetly, different from his usual bored tone. Hizashi stills suspiciously as he waits for the teenager to explain himself further, “I wanted to show Izuku some of the games I usually play—he's never played before. I was gonna show him this weekend, but, y’know, he’ll be going away with uncle Sho for that training camp.”

Hizashi does pull away from the cupboard now, head cocking in Izuku’s direction.

The green-haired teenager shrugs with a crooked smile in agreement. He hadn’t known Hitoshi wanted to play games, but he’ll play along, “we finished our homework at school,” Izuku adds helpfully.

“Ah, sure then,” Hizashi finally shrugs, “I don’t mind. You know where it is, just make sure to put it away when you’re finished. Feel free to take over the living room. Sho and I’ll be leaving soon to shop —anything either of you want us to pick up? Speak now or forever hold your peace, yeah!”

“I-I’m fine!” Izuku assures, “um, thank you.”

“I’m fine too,” Hitoshi nods after rolling his eyes in Izuku’s direction, “thanks, uncle ‘zashi!”

Shota and Hizashi leave while Hitoshi is setting up the gaming console. Shota comes up behind the couch and ruffled light fingers through Izuku’s hair in greeting, before eyeing his nephew gruffly, “I hope you asked ‘zashi before touching his stuff.”

“I did.” Hitoshi scowls, kneeled on the floor in front of the television, eyes narrowed at his uncle who eyes him right back.

“They did!” Hizashi calls back from the kitchen at the same time as Hitoshi, peering into the living room, “leave them alone, Sho, they’re good boys!”

“Yeah, uncle Sho,” Hitoshi jeers playfully, “we’re good boys.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” the man huffs tiredly. “Are you two going to be alright while we’re gone?”

The question is directed at the both of them, but Izuku feels two sets of questioning eyes locking on him. He gives a nod, trying not to let an embarrassed flush turn his whole face red.

He’ll admit he’s still been a bit clingy, but he’s finally starting to calm down, “we’ll be fine.”

“’course you two will,” Hizashi shoots Izuku a supportive smile, “no doubt about it. We’ll have our phones on us if you two have any trouble.”

“There won’t be, you’ll only be gone a couple hours,” Hitoshi reminds, finally satisfied with the console. He swiftly changes the tv to an HDMI setting and steps back with a controller in his hands, “we probably won’t even move. I swear, you two worry more than *mom*.”

“Where do you think I learned it?” Shota teases lightly, hiding the bottom of his face in the collar of his sweatshirt. Hitoshi huffs in

annoyance, plopping down on the couch beside Izuku and leaning back to glare directly at his uncle towering over the back of the couch. Shota eyes him, mouth still buried in his sweater before ruffling the boy's hair as well.

"Everyone always thought I was the worrier," Hizashi laughs from the doorway.

"You are," Shota deadpans, eyeing his husband distastefully.

"Hey! I'm no worse than you!" Hizashi pouts.

"I thought you guys were leaving?" Hitoshi cocks his head, interrupting their bickering with far more ease than Izuku ever thinks he'll be able to muster.

"Right, right," Hizashi laughs, carding his fingers through his hair. He's wearing a half-bun, so he just drags his fingers through the long strands at the nape of his neck. "We're goin', we're goin'."

"Behave," Shota sighs tiredly, finally pulling away from the couch and following his husband to the door.

The teens listen to the men leaving as Hitoshi maneuvers through the console menu. Izuku frowns that the control pushed into his hands, shivering lightly as Oboro leans in close to check out the controller in his hands. The ghost lets out a '*whoop*' when he sees what game Hitoshi had picked for them.

A combat game—one that Izuku knows he'll suck at.

And he *does*.

"Wow, Izu," the ghost winces twenty minutes later—four *game overs* later— "I didn't know someone could be that bad at aiming."

"Like you could do any better," the boy scoffs, and Oboro squawks in offense.

"I'm going to assume you're talking to Ro, considering you'd have died for the, probably, *thousandth* time if it weren't for me," Hitoshi cocks his head in Izuku's direction, hardly taking his eyes of the TV, where he's shooting something.

The ghost bursts into laughter at Hitoshi's words, and Izuku just pouts, "that's an exaggeration."

“Is it though?” Oboro teases.

“I didn’t come here to be bullied,” Izuku huffs playfully. He can’t say he really likes video games. “I never knew people could be so critical about a shooter game.”

“That’s the fun of it,” Oboro tells him seriously, watching the screen, Hitoshi’s character, intently, “and back to you retort: I definitely could do better. Who do you think Hizashi used to play this game with, huh? It certainly wasn’t Shota—he's about as good at this game as you are.”

“You played this game?” Izuku pauses, looking at the ghost to his side. Hitoshi turns towards them as well, blinking in surprise.

“I introduced Hizashi,” Oboro tells him proudly, chest puffing out like it’s an achievement, “I actually think this might’ve been my console. None of my siblings were into games, and I know my folks gave my friends some of my old stuff—but anyways, yeah! This was one of my favorite games; used beat Hizashi’s ass at it!”

“Woah,” Izuku grins, “I didn’t know we were sitting with an expert. Your critiques are suddenly more upsetting.”

“Why do I feel like I’m missing something again?” Hitoshi pouts, looking between Izuku and the space beside him. He’s actually almost looking at the ghost, surprisingly.

“He says he used to play this game a bunch,” Izuku jerks his thumb in Oboro’s direction, “says he used to beat all his friends at it. Says he’s an *expert*.”

“I did not say that!” Oboro frowns.

“You definitely implied it,” Izuku shrugs in reply.

“Wait,” Hitoshi turns to them fully, “Ro’s an expert at this game? Wait —can he hold a controller? I’d love to play a self-proclaimed *expert*.”

Izuku’s thought stutter to a stop, gaze shooting to his ghost friend who’s staring back wide eyed. “Could I... hold a controller?”

Izuku’s hands tighten on the controller in his hands before he’s holding it out as an offering. Oboro hesitates for just a second before finally reaching out to take it. He has an easier time holding things that are bigger in size, but still lightweight— so unlike with the pocky

the day before, he doesn't drop it.

"Yeah..." Hitoshi mutters, "I will definitely never get used to that..."

"Can you push the buttons?" Izuku ignores the other teen, watching Oboro intently. He still struggles with technology—phones and screens glitch out and he tends to drain the battery life on devices, but that doesn't seem to be a problem with the remote.

Oboro's thumb hovers over one of the buttons, and in the next second, the game's resumed—Oboro's character shooting Hitoshi's.

"Hey!" the purple-haired teen squawks, swirling around to the screen as the '*you died*' music plays, "asshole! I wasn't ready! And-and we're on the same team!"

Oboro is absolutely cackling.

Hitoshi pouts as Oboro adjusts his hold on the controller. Izuku looks between the two of them, smiling to himself as he does so. The look almost drops off his face when he sees Oboro completely frozen in place, staring cautiously at the screen.

He opens his mouth to ask what happened, when Oboro's controller buttons make clicking noises as they're used, and the screen changes.

To a chat log.

Hitoshi freezes too as it opens, and Izuku feels like he can't even breathe as the online curser swiftly flies over the onscreen keyboard.

Hi.

"Holy shit!" Hitoshi flails in surprise, staring at the screen before his head turns to the floating controller. He swallows nervously, "uh, h-hi Ro."

"Oh my God," Oboro whispers in awe, "I can talk to him! I... woah."

Hitoshi

"I'm so afraid right now," Hitoshi gives a nervous laugh, rubbing at the back of his neck, "this feels a bit too much like Ouija board or something..."

Sorry

Izuku's basically a Ouija board.

"I am not!" Izuku sputters, turning from the screen to glare intently at the ghost.

"You kinda are," Oboro shrugs.

"Ro's actually got a point with that one, man."

"It feels like it's always two against one with you two," Izuku pouts, but it doesn't linger long. "This is really cool, I mean, I never thought O—ah, *Ro*, would be able to really communicate with anyone but me."

"What, mad you gotta share you ghost friend?" Hitoshi teases.

"You wouldn't want him if you could see the stupid grin on his face."

Oboro pouts. **Ouch**

"Harsh, Izuku," Hitoshi snickers playfully, gesturing to the ghost with one hand and the tv screen with the other, "look, you hurt his feelings."

"No—I-I ugh! You two are insufferable!" Izuku sinks back into the couch, arms crossing over his chest, "I'm not talking to either of you anymore, and that really sucks for the one who uses my laptop to watch romcoms."

Hitoshi shoots a sly look at the floating controller as buttons mash hurriedly.

I like the plot! :(

"That can't be your excuse for everything," Izuku teases from his slumped position.

"Yeah man," Hitoshi nods, grinning like Cheshire cat, "just admit you like the dirty stuff."

Ur so mean.

"Tell me something I don't already know, my friend," Hitoshi give a dramatic sigh, eyebrows arching gleefully. "Now, are we gonna play or not? Izuku promised an expert, yeah?"

Ur on.

“Finally, some competition—er...” Hitoshi pauses, glancing at Izuku who’s waiting with narrowed eyes to make eye contact, “no offense, Izuku.”

“Offense taken,” the green-haired teen sighs, sinking even lower into the couch.

Hitoshi frowns, looking at the controllers and then the TV, “why don’t you ask me those questions you were talking about at lunch last week? The ones about... about my Quirk?”

“You didn’t want to answer those,” Izuku reminds, brows furrowed in confusion.

“I didn’t want to answer at school,” the other replies slowly, “I’ll answer them here. Besides, Ro probably needs me to have a sabotage anyways. It’s a favor for him.”

Cocky.

“Courteous,” Hitoshi corrects, shooting the hovering controller at his side a grin. “We playing or not? Feel free to menu if you have stuff to say, or, y’know, you need a break.”

“Let me get my notebook first!” Izuku chirps, jumping off the couch and padding down the hallway hurriedly. “Don’t start without me!”

The controller doesn’t move to follow Izuku, or stop floating, so Hitoshi knows the ghost hasn’t left. It’s oddly comforting that the ghost likes him enough to stay with him until Izuku returns.

“Y’know, you’re not as scary as I thought you were,” Hitoshi finds himself saying to the empty room.

The controller stills before the buttons start dipping as they’re pressed.

Thank you.

I didn’t mean to scare you.

“You wanted to scare my uncles, didn’t you?”

No comment.

Hitoshi laughs aloud, leaning back against the couch easily, “you’re pretty cool, Ro.”

Not so bad yourself, Hitoshi.

Hitoshi shivers as he reads his name on the screen. “It’s still weird you know my name.”

): <

“Back!” Izuku chirps as he rounds the couch and collapses back into his spot.

“Good,” Hitoshi grins as the ghost exits out of the chat logs, “we can start now. Ready to go, Ro?”

“He’s ready,” Izuku replies without even looking up from the notebook in his hands. Hitoshi grins as he starts the game. It takes a second for Izuku to organize himself, but when he does, Hitoshi and Oboro are already in a game.

“So, what did you say you were asking questions for?” Hitoshi asks, half distracted by the game.

“I just like to analyze Quirks,” Izuku shrugs, tugging his knees up to his chest so he can use his thighs as a table, propping his notebook open, “it’s always been a hobby. I’ve done all the great Heroes, and now I’ll do you too!”

“All of them?” Hitoshi glances over quickly, “like uncle Sho and ‘zashi?”

“Uh huh,” Izuku nods, flipping to a new page where he writes some basic stuff, “and most of the Yuuei teachers. All Might, Midnight, Snipe. I’ve done some limelight's and occasional undergrounds when I can find them. The top ten—Hawks, Endeavor—”

“I get it,” Hitoshi huffs a laugh, “I’m convinced. Nothing too invasive though, right?”

“Nope,” Izuku assures, “just some things I’ve been dying to ask, like, where did your Quirk come from? It's super cool, but it’s nothing like Shota’s, and he’s your uncle, so... inherited? Hereditary?”

Izuku is almost vibrating in his seat as the words tumble out of his mouth.

It wasn’t often he actually asked questions and got answers. Plus, Hitoshi’s Quirk was just so cool, and he’d only seen it once during the

festival.

“Well,” the other boy hums thoughtfully, one of his finger not in use tapping against the controller, “my mom has a hypnosis Quirk—well, it’s a bit more like a paralytic. She can’t give suggestions like I can when people are under the effects, but she can ease people into a hypnotized state. My dad has a persuasion Quirk. People are still in full control, conscious, but they’re… compelled to follow his suggestions, I guess. He doesn’t use it very often.”

“So, you got the best attributes from both?” Izuku bounces in his seat, thrilled at the new information, “an aspect of your mother’s paralytic that takes over control and opens their mind up to suggestions, and your father’s persuasion that acts as the hypnotic trance?”

“Uh,” Hitoshi blinks, looking away from the screen to glance at Izuku. “Yeah. You… you don’t think it’s, like, weird or—”

“That is so cool! Your Quirk is perfectly suited for hero work, I mean, think about the hostage situations that you could diffuse— hostage negotiations could be solved with just a question from you—” Izuku blinks, turns curious eyes onto the other teen, “it *is* question based, right? That’s what I noticed during the festival.”

“Yeah,” Hitoshi frowns as he pushes some buttons. Izuku has no idea what he does, but beside him, Oboro groans, “question activated. But not all questions. I have to want to use my Quirk, and the question has to be directed at someone. I can’t ask a question aimed at, say, uncle Sho, and take control of you if you answer it instead.”

Izuku scribbles that down in his notebook, lifting his pen to his mouth to chew on the end of it when he’s finished, “I was wondering about that. How many people can you control at once? Limitations?”

“It gets harder the more people I have under,” Hitoshi answers, turning to him with a raised eyebrow. “The most I’ve had under is three— and I can’t make them do anything they couldn’t do of their own conscious mind. I also can’t give instructions with too many steps.”

“Three,” Izuku hums, before looking up at Hitoshi, “the festival, right? Ojiro mentioned you used your Quirk on him—and I’m assuming the rest of your team as well. He warned me, you know? I didn’t heed it very well though.”

“No,” Hitoshi agrees with a sly smile, looking half at the screen and

half at Izuku, “you were actually pretty easy to get under.”

Hitoshi goes quiet after though, looking unseeing at the screen before looking briefly at Izuku, eyebrows furrowed thoughtfully, “I played pretty dirty during the festival.”

“No, you didn’t,” the green-haired boy denies without looking up from his writing. “Quirk usage was encouraged. We all used ours, why was it playing dirty for you to use yours too? And besides, you didn’t even play dirty, you just played into the element of surprise, which was pretty genius, actually.”

“Yeah, but your guys’ Quirks aren’t as invasive.” Hitoshi shrugs, joystick moving under the ministrations of his thumb, “I literally get into your head and take control. When you’re under my Quirk, you’re at my mercy. It’s... villainous.”

“No,” Izuku does look up now, mouth pressed in a frown. “No Quirk is villainous. It’s what the person does with it that’s the defining factor. No Quirk is villainous, but in the sense, any Quirk could be villainous. You wouldn’t say Quirks like Erasure are villainous, right?”

“You sound like uncle Sho,” Hitoshi huffs, head cocking to the side slightly, “*’A Quirk is a tool, it’s what you do with it that matters, not what it can do.*’” Hitoshi mimics Shota’s monotone drawl almost perfectly.

The green-haired teen hides a laugh behind his hand, “he’s right though.”

“Uh huh,” Hitoshi snorts, shaking his head. He leans closer to Izuku, attempting to see what’s in the notebook he’s working on, “so what’s with the notebook? I thought you were just asking questions?”

“Oh,” Izuku pauses, tugging the book towards his chest. “I record them too... It’s... really just analysis. Like I said before. I’ve always liked Quirks so I... well, I decided to analyze them? It’s just a hobby, and they’re not very good. It’s weird, I know—”

“It’s not,” Hitoshi shakes his head, “it’s pretty cool. How many do you have?”

“Analysis entries or notebooks?”

Hitoshi’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise, “both?”

“Thirteen,” Izuku bites his lip. “Thirteen journals, and... well, thirteen

journals *worth* of entries—but take into account that the first couple are in *crayon*, and not all the pages are actually analysis. So... a lot."

"No kidding," Hitoshi blinks, leaning back against the couch

"Yeah," Izuku gives a nervous laugh, "creepy, huh?"

"No?" Hitoshi frowns, sinking even further into the couch and eyeing Izuku thoughtfully, "why would it be creepy? Analysis is an actual job. People get paid to do what you do for free. If your analysis is creepy then... so is my Quirk."

"But your Quirk isn't—"

"Then neither is your analysis."

Izuku blows out a breath through his nose. He knows Hitoshi's not gonna let it go—one out of hundreds telling him it's not creepy isn't good odds, but he doesn't want to argue over it. "Okay."

"For the record," Oboro chimes in, not tearing his eyes away from the screen, "I never thought it was creepy. Very insightful."

Seeming satisfied with Izuku's answer, Hitoshi arches an eyebrow and turns back to the screen, "so has anyone looked at your analysis entries? Shota, Hizashi? Anyone?" Izuku shakes his head frantically, "can I...?"

Izuku chokes on a breath. "They're not, um, good?" Izuku offers slowly, "Sorry, just, it's a hobby, y'know? Something to occupy my time and well... I just do them for me? S-sorry—"

"Nah," Hitoshi shakes his head, "that's fair. Maybe sometime you'll let me check out my analysis. I'm sure it'll be useful. And I'm sure the ones you have on 1-A, because I know you definitely have them—would be useful if I ever manage to get in."

"If... if you get into the class, I'll let you read some analysis, but, uh, maybe not on our peers without their consent. Pros are fair game though, because a lot of it is public information." Izuku offers slowly. "Think of it as a consolation prize for achieving your goal?"

"Positive reinforcement?" Hitoshi raises an eyebrow, lips curling into a smile. "Wait, consolation? Whatcha saying here, Izuku?"

"It'll be tough joining our class, even though I know you can do it,"

Izuku offers with a smile. “I said what I said.”

Izuku asks a couple more questions, and Oboro and Hitoshi play for a while longer. So long, in fact, that none of them even hear the door open.

It’s Oboro who lets out a yelp of surprise, and suddenly the controller that had been in the ghost’s hands is flying in front of Izuku’s face, and he's dropping his pencil in an attempt to catch it before it hits the ground.

Izuku manages to grab a hold of the controller just as Shota rounds the corner, eyeing them, “good, nothing’s on fire and you’re both alive.”

“Such high expectations,” Hitoshi drawls in return, sounding unfazed, but looking guilty. Maybe that’s why the boy doesn’t turn to look at his uncle like Izuku does.

Shota snuffs a breathy laugh as he steps closer to the couch, pausing behind it as he had earlier. The two boys tense up, and Oboro sucks in a nervous breath. It doesn’t help Izuku feel at ease in the slightest.

The man is quiet for a second until: “Why do you have your notebook and a controller, Problem Child?”

Shota eyes the book resting in the teens lap, and the controller he’s holding *upside down*. Almost as if reading his mind as he speaks, the teen flushes and turns the controller so he’s awkwardly holding it before Shota can even finish his sentence.

“I, um, multitask?”

“Izuku is a dude of absolute skill, uncle Shota,” Hitoshi adds blandly, not looking away from the screen.

Shota blinks once, then twice. He sighs heavily, rubbing at his eyes with his thumb and forefinger, “I don’t understand kids, why do I even try?”

Izuku watches as Shota turns on his heels, walking into the kitchen to help Hizashi put the groceries away. The blonde laughs, but Izuku doesn’t know what Shota said to prompt it. He bows his head in embarrassment anyways.

“He didn’t buy that at all,” Hitoshi whispers.

“I mean,” Oboro laughs breathily, “he was holding the controller the wrong way.”

“You gave it to me like that!” Izuku hisses under his breath.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this chapter!

I might take a short break with this fic, I haven't decided yet? I don't want to lose interest, so I'm gonna work on some other things for this fandom that I've been thinking about, but I won't be gone long! I still love this fic, and I know exactly where I'm taking it, I just don't want to burn out especially when my brain wants to focus on something else!

One of the fics I'm working on (in no relation to this one) is called: In Need of a Hero and it's a two parter. It's a quirkless! Izuku meets regular civilain (out of costume) Shota. I thought the idea was cute, so I hyperfocused on it for weeks :) As a warning though, it does revolve around a sort of suicide attempt, so, please if you're gonna read it, check out the tags first! I just thought I'd boost it here in case anyone's interested!

Anyways, as always, I look forward to reading any comments you guys leave me! I greatly appreciate them all, and it's always amazing to know what you guys are thinking and if you're liking this! Lemme know! Thank so much for taking the time to read! <3

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello!
>
> I'm back! Thanks to all the kind comments on the last chapter! It was a wild break from writing this, so I'm glad to be back to normal life where I can write!
>
> Onwards to the new chapter, I'm sure some of you know where this is heading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is excited for the summer camp—er... the *bootcamp*.

He'd been excited for it since Shota had announced it to the class (how could he not be excited by the concept of staying at a forest lodge with his classmates?), and his excitement had only flickered briefly when the man had grinned cunningly and announced that it was more training oriented than he'd originally led on.

Honestly, the word bootcamp coming from Shota was pretty scary, especially since they all knew how much of a hardass Shota could be during regular Heroics classes; Izuku can only imagine what his guardian has planned for them. The one thing Izuku knows, is that he certainly is glad he's not one of the students who failed the physical exam last week.

He feels very sorry for Ashido, Kaminari, Kirishima, Sato and Sero.

Sunday sees Izuku packing up a duffle bag with clothes and some of his notebooks and pencils.

"Notebooks?" Oboro, who's flopped on his stomach on Izuku's bed, "you're going to camp, man, why do you need *notebooks*?"

"1-B is going too," Izuku snorts, lulling his head to glance at the ghost, "I'm hoping there will be some down time where I can study some of their Quirks, and maybe ask some questions. There are a lot of cool Quirks in their class, and I only just got glimpses of them during the festival."

"Right, right," Oboro nods, a smile twitching onto his lips, "I forgot

you were a Quirk nerd.”

Izuku rolls his eyes, "why do I even talk to you again?”

“Because I’m fun!” Oboro pouts, “and I’ll be a lot more annoying if you don’t humor me. My power is festering, Izuku, I could be a God.”

“You can barely pick up a book.”

“Hey! I’m good at books now! And controllers. *And* I held the pocky, and that glass—”

“You shattered the glass,” Izuku reminds without so much as a glance back.

“But I still held it!" Oboro pauses thoughtfully, shifting round so he’s sitting crisscross and can lace his arms over his chest. His lip juts out in a more dramatic pout, “briefly, at least.”

Izuku snorts a laugh as he moves from his desk to the dresser. He fishes out a couple changes of clothes—a week's worth, before heading to his closet where he tries to figure out what to bring sweater wise.

Despite it being summer, the forest still gets cold at night, and Izuku just knows that his guardians (and the ghost at his side) will be on his case making sure he’s prepared to keep himself warm. He’d already seen Hizashi pack away his heated jacket with the rest of the camping gear that had been on the list Shota had handed out.

He doesn’t know if he’ll be cold enough for that, so he picks out some sweaters. He thinks about grabbing his All Might sweater, but shakes the thought away. His peers, minus Kacchan, don’t know the depths of his Hero worship, and he’d like to keep it that way as long as he can. It’s bad enough they’ve seen him scribbling away in his notebooks, and muttering to himself like a weirdo. He doesn’t need to go 100% crazy fanboy yet.

“The blue one’s nice,” Oboro hums from the bed, watching Izuku intently as the teen rifles through sweaters. The blue one in question was a fairly thin sweater that zipped up. It was good for working out —easy on and off, lightweight but still warm.

He pulls it off the hanger and shoves it in the duffle.

He pulls out a second sweater, a hoodie that’s thick and warm—it'll be good for the evening. He doesn’t know what Shota has planned, but

he doubts their evenings will be too exciting. Shota is the one always preaching that they take care of their own needs and rest—he'll push them hard, but he won't overwork them.

"Anything else you think I might need? You've seen what happens at these bootcamps, haven't you?"

Oboro paused, cupping his chin between his thumb and pointer finger thoughtfully, "I think that about covers it. Clothes, warm things—you don't gotta worry about food or anything sleeping wise, I don't think. Shota and Hizashi will probably go through a checklist later because they're worriers, but I think you're good to go."

"Cool," Izuku hums as he zips the duffle bag up. He moves it from the edge of his bed to the desktop, before flopping down beside Oboro. "Are you coming with us?"

"Is that a question?" Oboro snorts, "'course I am. I'd rather be at camp watching you guys suffer through Sho's training then sitting in 'zashi's English class and listening to kids butcher pronunciation."

"It can't be that bad," Izuku glances to the side where Oboro is shooting him an unamused look.

"Says the guy who couldn't pronounce *hamburger* to save his life."

"It's just such a weird word," Izuku defends with a huff. "'zashi said I did pretty good. Half my class can't get it right either. There are just too many sounds in it."

"'zashi's a liar," Oboro teases, scooting to the edge of the bed. "He's just a sucker for your determined doe-eyes whenever you attempt English words, and I think he just thinks it's too cute to correct outside of class. Like when toddlers have lisps and can't annunciate quite right, and parents don't want them to stop *just yet*, so they don't really correct them."

Now Izuku's offended, "I am not a toddler with a lisp. Who needs to say ha-m-bug-ar anyways? English is weird. It's so much easier to say in Japanese."

"You're missing a full 'r' in there, 'zuku." Oboro laughs, and Izuku's shoulder slump in defeat. "And like you guys don't do American style hamburger night at least once a week due to Hizashi's insistence. Y'know, he used to bring burgers to school all the time for lunch—what a strange dude. Sho and I just had our bentos, and here's 'zashi

with his decked-out hamburger."

"Are you planning on bullying everyone today?" Izuku snipes out with a sigh.

He's not actually offended; he's very aware English isn't his strongest subject. It's a good thing he doesn't have big plans to travel to English-speaking countries like All Might did. He's not sure he'd survive America—well, unless he had Hizashi there with him. Or All Might. Or, even Oboro. He seems pretty fluent.

"Nah," Oboro laughs, "I'm done. Sorry, didn't mean to call you out there. It really is cute—and it's a hard word to get right. Trust me, 'zashi used to correct us on the daily back in school. We'd tease him *about* the hamburger, and then he'd tease us about our pronunciation *of* hamburger."

Oboro snickers to himself like he's reminiscing one exact memory before smiling softly at Izuku, "I always knew he'd make a good English teacher; I'd never known anyone as obsessed with American culture."

"That sounds about right," Izuku snorts a laugh as he zips up his duffle bag.

The next morning they're at school very early in the morning.

Shota has stuff to set up for the trip, so he and Vlad King disappear from the teacher's lounge to make sure everything is in order for when they leave. Shota's shoulders are slumped as Vlad talks on about the busses and everything they need to have in order before school starts.

Each class is getting their own—Izuku's not entirely sure why when he's fairly sure they could all probably fit in one of the bigger Yuuei has at the ready.

He doesn't bother voicing this, Shota and Vlad already obviously have it sorted.

Izuku stays in the office with Hizashi.

They're early enough that Izuku is still pretty tired. He'd been in that state of being too excited to shut his eyes and fall asleep, so he's exhausted.

He's cuddled up in a *Put Your Hands Up* radio sweatshirt Hizashi had had in the teacher's office, considering he hadn't thought the school would be so chilly, and that all his warm stuff was packed away in the duffle he just knew would erupt his stuffed in clothes all over the place if he opened it even an inch.

Izuku sits at Hizashi's side, pressed in close to him as the man types away on his computer. Izuku's cheek smooshes against Hizashi's upper arm, body slumped against his guardian. Hizashi's leather jacket is tossed over the back of his chair, and his directional speaker is set off to the side—he doesn't seem bothered in the slightest that Izuku is using his arm as a pillow.

He's probably used to it though—he did marry Shota after all.

He doesn't mean to fall asleep; he hadn't even realized he started leaning to the side until after half of his face was smooshed comfortably in Hizashi's shirt. Hizashi doesn't mention it either, so Izuku's eyes slip closed as he enjoys the serenity of the teacher's office before the teachers arrive.

Izuku dozes off for maybe an hour, just until more teachers start to arrive.

It's still a bit too early to be waiting in the hallways, or in the classroom, because his peers will get suspicious if he's there first. He'd always been the fourth or fifth to arrive at school when he'd lived with his mother, and as far as most of his peers and friends know, he still *does* live with his mother.

That said, even if he could sleep a bit longer in the teacher's office until a decent time to announce his arrival, he doesn't. He's not completely comfortable *sleeping* in a room full of Pro Heroes, even though he trusts them all with his life.

He sits at Shota's desk and uses the man's computer to work on an essay for Midnight-sensei's class that's not due until the week after the bootcamp. Izuku doesn't want to leave it until last minute, even though Midnight is by far the most lenient teacher of the lot of them. Hizashi is a close second, and Shota— well, Shota is dead *last*.

When a reasonable time arrives, Izuku slips off Hizashi's sweatshirt, almost instantly missing the warmth of it, and pulls on his backpack. He grabs a hold of his duffle bag and ducks his head bashfully as Hizashi stands to pull him into a farewell hug.

They'd already briefly done as much earlier, Hizashi hugging both him and Shota. Izuku had ducked his head as Hizashi had pulled Shota into a kiss by squishing the dark-haired man's cheeks.

The hug is tight and protective, but soft and comforting.

Hizashi gives good hugs, Izuku decides as he buries his cheek in the man's chest. It's a weird thing to him to be hugging someone goodbye, it's another thing he doesn't remember doing often with his mother.

It's only now that he's away from her that he really realizes how different his childhood had been to others. For the longest time he'd only had Kacchan's family to go off. A soft-spoken father who was sweet and caring, and a loud, protective, loving mother who seemed to always be forcing affection onto Kacchan.

Honestly, it had always stumped Izuku why Auntie was so insistent on hugging Kacchan, and telling him she loves him. Why she'd ruffle his hair affectionately even when he looked like a rabid dog about to bite her.

It was only as Izuku grew up that he started to realize that deep down his childhood friend loved the affection, even if the scowls and distaste spoke differently. Auntie enforced it, not giving Kacchan the chance to puff out his chest and deny advances of affection. He liked it, but didn't want to admit it. Wouldn't ask for it. So, she just did it.

It was the opposite for Izuku.

He craved his mother's affection—her love. After he'd been diagnosed Quirkless and had doctor after doctor tell her that he was delusional when it came to his *imaginary friends*, she'd mentally and physically pulled away from him.

He'd always known Kacchan's family was drastically different from his own mother, and even his own father, who he barely remembers now. He'd always wished he had something like Kacchan, but he'd never thought his relationship with his mother to be that strange.

But he can see it now that there's something to compare to. Now that he's had people who treat him like Kacchan's parents treat him.

Hizashi holds him snugly for a moment before pulling back.

Without a thought, the man even goes as far as to press a kiss on the top of Izuku's head. The subconscious innocence of it fills his stomach

with a fuzzy warm feeling. Izuku doesn't even think Hizashi realizes he'd done it; he'd just swiftly carried on to ruffling Izuku's untamed curls and attempting to fix them like a fretting parent.

"Good luck at camp, Sunshine!" Hizashi grins, "take care of yourself and don't let Sho push you around too much! Also, try'n make sure he eats something *besides* those dreaded jelly pouches, ya'dig? *And* same goes for you! Real food, 'zuku, don't let him coerce you into eating like a college kid because it's easier, yeah?"

"Got it," Izuku mumbles meekly, cheeks still flushed as he turns over the fact Hizashi had *kissed* his head in his mind. He feels small and comfortable; a familiar but so very foreign feeling. "See ya later, 'zashi."

Hizashi's grin widens as he lets out a cooing noise, hugging Izuku again.

Well, squeezing him tightly to the point Izuku can hardly breathe, before easing his strength a little.

"It'll be so quiet without you two around," the man pouts theatrically, "I'll just miss ya loads! Be careful, ya'hear? Watch your temperature. Tell Sho if you get too cold. You've got the heated jacket for a reason. Use it, yeah?"

Izuku bobs his head in a nod as his cheeks darken. Midnight, who's across the room, snickers into her hand and Izuku wants to flee the room. Who knew Hizashi was such a mother hen?

"C'mon, 'zash, leave the kid alone," Midnight scoffs, coming to his defense. She flashes Izuku a teasing smile and a wink, an *aunt* sort of air to her as she reclines back in her office chair. "I'm sure he's well aware of all this. I don't doubt you and Sho already gave him this lecture once or twice or a *hundred* times—and you're forgetting the biggest worry-wart of them all is going *with* him. Shota will watch the lil' green-bean like a hawk."

"But it's like sending my baby off to kindergarten for the first time!" Hizashi cries out, squeezing Izuku just a little bit tighter. Izuku feels his cheeks flare in embarrassment, but he doesn't try to pull away.

It's obvious that the three of them are all a little shaken after the mall incident still, even if things have calmed down at this point. Plus, he'd heard some of his friends mentioning their own parent's hesitance to let them go after all the fuss the League of Villains has stirred up

between the USJ, Hosu and the most recent mall incident where they'd all been in the same building as the leader of the villain organization, even if none of them besides Izuku had really been in direct danger.

…

Not that he's saying Hizashi and Shota are his *parents*. They're... guardians. This is just an arrangement of convenience. They aren't... they're not his parents. They're just really amazing teachers and Pro Heroes who're looking out for him, right? *Right.*

"Your husband is literally his teacher," Nemuri deadpans. "And that's no baby, babe. That's a full-ass teenager. He's fine, right, Kiddo? He'll *be* fine."

"It's just bootcamp," Izuku agrees with a tiny, disarming smile, "what can possibly happen?"

"Ahh, you're right," Hizashi pouts, finally releasing the teenager. "I just hate that this camp is so secretive—I mean none us know where it'll be. I know it's the same thing every year but this year... feels different. I mean with everything that's already happened, I'm sure a lot of us are sorta *on edge*..."

"It'll be fine," Shota's voice rings from the doorway. His shoulders are slumped as he treks casually into the room, pausing at Izuku's side where he observes the situation over his nose. "I'll be there, and Sekijiro will be there. I can handle my hell class, and I hope to God he can handle his."

"That's almost one of the nicest things you've ever said to me, Aizawa," Vlad King drawls from behind him, arms crossed over his chest. "For the record, I can handle my class perfectly fine. It is the superior Heroics class after all—powerful, responsible, and respectful —can you say the same, *Eraser*?"

Shota waves him off tiredly, "like I said, it'll be fine."

Shota pauses, gaze dropping to Izuku, "you should head out. I've seen some of your classmates in the halls and I know you don't want to be caught sneaking out of the teacher's office when the halls are crowded."

"R-right!" Izuku bows anxiously. "Um, G-goodbye!" The boy announces to the room before he can think better of it.

He's half aware of the fact the majority of his teachers are in the room at this point—some chuckle, while others (Nemuri) wave at him with fond looks. Hizashi looks like he's refraining from catching Izuku in a third hug, and Shota looks indifferent, which he probably is considering he'll be with Izuku and the rest of 1-A on the trip.

"Stay safe, Sunshine!" Hizashi hollers as Izuku flees the room. He offers a wave over his shoulder as the door slips shut behind him. He only lets out a breath of relief when he's a couple steps away from the office door.

"That was embarrassing to watch," Oboro joins Izuku at his side, and the teen has absolutely no idea where the ghost had been watching from. Last Izuku had seen him, Oboro was following Shota out to make sure everything was in order.

"I'd rather watch Sho be boring, but *potentially* eavesdrop on his plans for you and the class then to watch you drool on 'zashi as you sleep while he stare at his computer like a zombie," Oboro had scoffed with a playful smile, rushing out the door after Shota and Vlad King.

Izuku couldn't argue with that—well, most of it. *I do not drool*, he'd wanted to huff out, had to physically bite his own tongue to keep the words in.

He blatantly ignores the ghost now, who wilts when he realizes, but falls into step with Izuku nonetheless, "I was just kiddinngg! You left the room like an expert, honest. 'zuku? C'monnn!"

Most of the class had already gathered in the 1-A classroom by the time Izuku arrives. Uraraka rushes up to him, Iida not far behind her. Even Todoroki cautiously settles at Izuku's side, eyes shifting suspiciously around the room for whatever reason.

Oboro glares at the half-hot half-cold classmate as if just being in both of their presences will make Izuku drop into a hypothermic state.

It will not.

It's not long before the rest of his class trickles in, and then the bell rings.

They're all in their seats, bags and luggage propped up on their desktops or at their feet. The door rolls open sharply one second after the bell, and Shota's stalking into the room, looking more tired than he had when Izuku had last seen him.

“I hope you’re all ready for camp,” the man drawls out, gesturing them up with a lazy wave of his hand, “it’s a long drive—you have ten minutes to do as you please. There will not be a lot of rest stops, so take that into account. I expect to see you all at the bus loading zone not a second later than these allotted ten minutes. We can, and will leave without you; consider this a lesson of punctuality.”

The man pauses, eyeing them lazily as he digs his hands into his pockets and slumps even further, “*nine minutes and fifty-four seconds*.”

The class jump to collect their belongings, as Shota stalks out of the room, leaving them with the threat hanging over their heads. Iida herds them along with authoritative words and chopping motions of his hands like he always does, even if they’re all already terrified of both the time limit ticking down fast, and the thought of being left behind.

Izuku’s panicked eyes catch a bored looking Oboro who glances over as if feeling his gaze. The ghost scans him before shrugging, “yeah... that’s not a logical ruse, he definitely will leave without you if you’re not there in time. It’s happened before, a few years back.”

That spurs Izuku on.

The bathrooms are a mess, but Izuku manages to sneak into one of the stalls to pee before hurrying out to the bus leading zone. He’s one of the first—the other three being Yaoyorozu, Koda and Todoroki.

Shota leans back against the bus doors as if guarding it, eyes slivering open at noise of another student arriving before he shuts them again with a hardly noticeable upward twitch of his lips. The minutes fly by and before they even hit eight minutes, the class is lined up and waiting.

Shota doesn’t move for nearly a full minutes before he lets out a sign and steps away. The doors to the bus open and he gestures to the cargo compartments under the bus, “belongings in here, and onto the bus.”

Bootcamp is a lot more intense than Izuku had assumed it would be going into it.

He hadn’t expected things to start right off the bus—who makes students traverse through the wilderness for over *eight* hours in an attempt to find a lodge in the middle of nowhere? Oboro laughs the

whole time, loud and annoying as he follows behind Izuku.

They arrive battered and exhausted, having missed the lunch Shota and the Pussycats had waved in front of their faces before they were thrown into the forest.

It's not all bad, Izuku supposes. They get a nice meal and hang out in the hot springs to relax before heading to bed. He meets Kota, even if the boy doesn't seem to particularly like Izuku, or, well, any of them (Oboro absolutely cackles when the small five-year-old sucker punches Izuku in the crotch).

Things hadn't gotten much easier after that.

The training is hard, but Izuku loves every minute of it. He works hard, and when there's a lapse in his own training, he watches what class 1-B can do. He knows very little about their Quirks, only what he can remember seeing from the Sports Festival.

As exhausting as it is, Izuku is glad to be here. It's fun, in a sense, hanging out with his class—sitting the in the hot springs together, cooking and eating together. Hanging out as a whole. It's different from their mall adventure, since no one has anywhere to be.

It's the third even that shit hits the fan.

It's all a mess really, villains are attacking the camp, and the only thing Izuku can think of is that fact that Kota is not there. Kota is just a little kid. He's alone, and defenseless, and the villains are *ruthless*. If they want to take out the kid, they will. The thought makes Izuku sick.

He takes off with Oboro on his tail, the ghost sprinting after him and shouting questions that Izuku can't think straight enough to answer. He has one thing on his mind, and that's finding Kota and bringing him to safety.

He knows exactly where Kota is—he'd brought the boy curry the evening before. It wasn't hard to follow Kota footprints yesterday, a well-used trail with small little footsteps that lead to a cliffside clearing. To the boy's secret base.

His steps falter and his breath gets trapped in his lungs as a dark thought catches in his mind.

If I managed to follow his footsteps to his location, who else could've?

That thought in itself has Izuku's heart sinking into his stomach as he pushes himself to move even faster. He's never been gladder for Shota making them do suicide-sprints as a punishment. It's really helped with his speed and stamina.

"Oh my God," Oboro wheezes out when they're finally trekking up the cliffside. Izuku's pace hasn't slowed at all, but Oboro still beats him up. The ghost freezes, faltering before he's whipping his head to look at Izuku, "Kota's not alone, Izu, you *really* need to get up here!"

Izuku's teeth clench, biting at the inside of his cheek to the point of drawing blood; a metallic tang washes over his tongue as he forces his tired legs and heaving lungs to work harder. To get there faster.

It's no more than a second or two before Izuku is stumbling to join Oboro at his side. The ghost is staring wide-eyed at Kota, who's shaking and curled in on himself under a towering man's gaze. The man takes slow, threatening steps towards the boy and seemed amused when Kota's head flinches back in fear.

It feels like Izuku blinks and suddenly he's between Kota and the villain. Oboro is right by Kota's side, down on one knee and assessing him without getting too close, while Izuku's body acts as a human shield. He'd seen the fearful tears in Kota's eyes, and prays that it's just fear and not pain making him cry.

"He's not hurt," Oboro breaths out after what feels like minutes, but can only really be a second.

Izuku feels a small weight drop off his shoulders at the information. The bigger part of him is gearing up for a fight at this villain in front of him tears off his cloak.

The first attack sends Izuku crashing into the rocky cliff behind him. He sucks in a breath of pain, and he half hears Oboro's panicked voice calling his name through the static ringing in his ears. Nothing feels broken yet, but it *hurts*. His arm aches, and feels heavy at his side.

"Whoopsie," the villain teases, "oh yeah, hey? You wouldn't happen to know where I can find a kid named Bakugou, would'ya?"

Izuku's body freezes as if Oboro had just stepped through him as the words register. *Bakugou*. They were looking for Kacchan? What... what does the League want with Kacchan...?

The villain's smile curls cruelly as he launches at Izuku with a heavy-

handed punch, “I still have a job to do after all!”

Izuku hardly manages to dodge the punch coming right at him, rocks and dirt raining down around them as the punch makes contact with the cliffside. Izuku swallows at the sheer force of it.

“I’ll take your silence to mean that you don’t know, is that right?” the villain sneers through a twisted smile, “oh good then.”

Izuku doesn’t even manage to get his feet under him when the villain kicks him in the stomach, sending him flying into the air. He wheezes as he flies, tasting blood but not knowing exactly where it’s coming from.

“Izuku!” Oboro cries out as Izuku’s back collides with the stone cliff again, falling lifelessly to the ground. The ghost is at his side the second he flops to the ground. “Oh my God, who the hell is this guy?”

Izuku can just shake his head as the ghost’s hands waver at his sides, “n-not yet,” Izuku manages out when Oboro goes to touch him—to use their Quirks— “try’n distract him. L-last resort. Please.”

Oboro’s face pinches in disbelief, annoyance flickering in his eyes as he pushes himself up, “I can help! Why won’t you let me?!”

Izuku hears the snarl in Oboro’s voice, the confusion that’s overcome by frustration. It only softens when Oboro follows Izuku’s gaze to Kota, still on his knees with tears streaming down his face, “okay,” the ghost finally breathes out, not looking pleased, “fine, I’ll try and distract him while you fight back. Don’t *die*. Just... tell me when to help.”

Izuku gives a light nod as he pushes himself up, the villain sauntering threateningly towards him.

It takes a second to long for Izuku to realize the villain had been talking the whole time—taunting and teasing. Izuku feels blood on his face, but he’s once again not sure where it’s coming from. A head wound? Splattered from somewhere else?

He knows he can’t be worried about Kacchan now. This villain is strong. He has Izuku beat in offense and defense. If he isn’t focused, he’ll die. If he doesn’t focus, *Kota* will die. That can’t happen. No one will die, not if he has anything to say about it.

Izuku charges forwards, One for All lighting up his veins. He throws a

punch that lands on the villain's muscular forearm—

—but nothing happens. The villain doesn't budge. One for All did *nothing* against him. *What the hell?*

"What the hell?" Oboro parrots dumbly from behind the villain as if hearing Izuku's own thoughts. Izuku peeks over at the ghost, who's mouth is dropped in shock, wide eyes glaring at where Izuku's fist is cushioned in bulging muscles.

He's tossed to the side like he's a weightless doll as the villain rambles on about his Quirk. Muscle regeneration. Enhanced speed and strength.

Izuku forces himself to his feet as the villain stalks closer, only just managing to leap back when the villain makes a punch at him. The force of the punch sends Izuku into the air, and then the villain appears through the rubble and sends him sprawled on the floor.

Izuku feel tired. His muscles tense in an attempt to get up, but he can't seem to force himself up.

"Oh shit, oh shit," Oboro hisses as he puts himself between the teen and the villain. There's not a lot he can do without Izuku's Quirk. "You've gotta get through me first, muscles," the ghost snarls. "I'm sorry, 'zuku, I've gotta use my Quirk. You're *not* dying here."

Oboro's stance takes a defensive position, as the villain steps closer, and closer. Ever step the villain takes, Oboro takes one back. Izuku knows as soon as he's within range to make contact, he will. Truthfully, Izuku doesn't know how Cloud will help them right now.

A cliffside is a dangerous place to lose the ability to navigate—one wrong step and you could fall off the edge. If Oboro makes a dense cloud to confuse the villain, who's to say it won't confuse Kota, or even Izuku himself as well?

And this isn't the kind of villain you can just run from.

If Oboro were to carry them out on a cloud, the villain would follow—or worse, make his way to Izuku's unsuspecting teachers and classmates.

Izuku pushes himself up faintly on wobbly limbs. He sucks in a breath.

"'m okay," he manages out, hardly audible—but Oboro seems to hear

it if the momentary tensing of his body is anything to go off. The ghost twitches like he's physically stopping himself from glancing back at Izuku, and instead keeps his attention locked on the incoming threat.

"How're you gonna save him, huh?" The villain's smile only grows wider, darker, as he continues forwards. "You're no Hero! You're just a fraud, and you'll die that way!"

Oboro is just before Izuku, hand reaching back and ready to make contact when the villain freezes, turning slowly to glance behind him. Oboro looks confused, but Izuku can just suck in a breath. Shit. *Kota*.

Izuku can hardly push himself up as Kota yells about his parents. Water Hose. He remembers seeing it in the news and Izuku thinks back to just recently where he'd gotten the details from Mandalay. How Kota was staying with his aunt and the Pussycats after being orphaned by a villain.

This villain is the one to do that? He killed Kota's parents?

He orphaned a little boy simply because he wanted to *kill* people?

A newfound anger rages through Izuku as he finally finds his bearings and launches himself up. Oboro watches in shock as Izuku launches himself overhead. He remembers shouting in anger, but doesn't exactly remember what he'd said. He's so mad—and he's hurting *for* Kota. Emotions don't belong in the battlefield, but he can't help it.

The villain catches Izuku surprise attack, catching his fist in a layer of muscle—but that's exactly what Izuku wants.

"It's not a matter of whether or not I can do it!" Izuku snarls out, One for All flickering through his body, "a Hero's job is to risk his life and turn his promises into a reality!"

Izuku lands a one-hundred percent One for All punch against the villain's face.

Izuku struggles to keep his footing as the ground rumbles in an explosion from the force of the villain being sent flying into the cliff. It fills Izuku with a sick sense of satisfaction—finally he manages to send the villain flying instead of the other way around.

"Shit." Izuku forces his attention up to Oboro, who's running towards where Kota had been knocked off his feet and is tumbling forwards.

Izuku moves the fastest he ever remembers moving, sliding painfully on his chest and stomach as he just manages to grasp the back of Kota's shirt between his teeth.

"That was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen," Oboro gasps, kneeling beside Izuku. "And I'm dead."

Izuku snorts a laugh out his nose as he mumbles a quiet apology to Kota without losing his grip on the boy's clothes. Izuku sees Oboro reaching down to Kota, almost subconsciously. Sometimes Izuku forgets Oboro is a Hero too—and a Hero's first response is always to help.

He shakes his head, expecting the ghost to phase through the boy, but to his genuine surprise, Oboro's hands actually catch on the boy's shirt.

Oboro freezes, gaze dropping to where his knee is pressed against Izuku's side.

He doesn't dwell on it—not when Izuku is holding a child up from falling off a cliff with nothing but his *teeth*. The ghost grabs a better grip on the fabric of the child's shirt and helps Izuku heft the boy up. Izuku darts grateful eyes in Oboro's direction, and the ghost just manages a half-smile through his own shock.

The ghost pulls himself away when Kota is safely on the ground, small chest heaving with panicked and adrenaline filled breaths as he stares down the cliff he'd almost fallen off.

Oboro is quiet for a second, thoughtful as he looks between Izuku and Kota, "I just touched the kid."

Izuku eyes the ghost with tired, pained eyes before he bows his head in an exhausted nod. He wants to say more, but his attention is drawn to where Kota is scrambling back away from the edge, scared eyes on Izuku, but not really looking at him.

"W-who was that?" the boy gasps out, watery eyes darting around them like he's searching out a second person, "s-something grabbed my shirt a-and pulled me up!"

Izuku glances at Oboro who frowns. Kota had felt it too. That's new.

"No one else was here," Izuku tells the boy softly, pushing himself up as well. He's so tired. His arm is definitely broken now, and he's still

bleeding, but he manages to push himself to his feet. Oboro is at his side, hands hovering like he's afraid Izuku will topple over. "Are you alright?"

Kota's eyes scan their surroundings once again before he gives a slight nod, he turns to look back at Izuku, "thank you for—" the words die in Kota's throat, but Izuku is busy surveying around them to gage the villain's status to really question the pause.

"We..." Izuku swallows, "we should get back to camp. It's not far—"

Rocks shift behind him, and Izuku whips around to see the villain stepping out of the crater he'd created when hitting the rocks. His muscle regenerate, and Izuku can just stare. Suddenly at his side, Oboro is muttering shocked profanities, and Kota scuffles back away from the threat.

It's not over yet.

Izuku's not sure how this villain is back up. How he's stronger than before. The villain really had just been toying with him until he could kill him. Now he was using his full power. His full potential.

Izuku barely managed to jump away with Kota, Oboro on his heels, as the villain strikes where they'd been standing.

He can barely think straight, but he knows he needs a plan.

He needs Shota. His guardian could erase this guy's Quirk, but Shota's not here. And he can't very well lead the villain back to the camp. Not only is that dangerous for the students and people in the camp, especially of Shota's *not* there, but he's not even sure he'd be fast enough to do it.

"What're you thinkin' here, 'zuku?" Oboro asks at his side, matching Izuku's steps.

The only thing he can think of doing is using One for All: one-hundred percent again. He can't just stand here, and he's not fast enough to lead Muscular along. He's stuck. And the only thing that matters is keeping Kota safe.

He tells the boy to run, and ignores the way Oboro's face pinches with worry as Izuku charges at the villain, veins lighting up with One for All.

He tries.

He really, really does.

But it's no use.

The villain is *strong*, and he's so *tired*, and One for All isn't *enough*.

There's really no denying it as Izuku is pressed back, and then down into the ground. Muscular using all his force to grind him into the ground like he's scuffing out the butt of a cigarette. He's going to die.

"Izuku!" Izuku hears Oboro's voice—he's so tired though. He hurts so much. The villain is on him, and it feels like he's dying. He's being ground into rocks, and it *hurts*. God, he can't die in front of a kid, in front of a *ghost*—

Izuku's thoughts shift to his teachers. A desperate jump like he's trying to comfort himself before he dies. Shota and Hizashi. His guardians. He never got to thank them for everything they've done for him. He *won't* get to thank them. He hopes they know. He hopes they know how thankful he is—how much he loves *cares* about them.

Izuku winces as his thoughts slowly dissipate, body feeling so heavy.

He's tired. He just wants to... to shut his eyes.

Izuku barely feels a hand on his arm, fingertips brushing over his skin and then all he sees is white.

For a moment he thinks he'd finally kicked the bucket, and that this was that light everyone always talked about when they survive a near death experience. He'd never been convinced it was a thing—but here he is now, facing it head on.

He didn't expect the afterlife to hurt as much as it did. Shouldn't the pain be gone?

Izuku chokes on a breath as he squeezes his eyes shut. Accepts his fate.

"What the fuck?" Muscular rumbles, distracted. "Where the hell'd this shit come from?!"

Izuku forces his eyes open as something drips onto him—water? Maybe? He's not sure. He sees the blank whiteness in front of his eyes, and... wait, that's *not* a light. That's dense fog in front of him, so dense

that he can hardly even make out the villain's face even when they're so close.

Oboro is solid at his side, hand clamped around Izuku's wrist. He'd put himself in the same position, squashed under this towering, heavy villain. Trapped. The ghost's teeth are clenched like he's in pain, and Izuku's heart breaks at the sight.

Oboro.

"I ain't lettin' you kick it so soon, 'zuku," Oboro grunts out, face pinched in pain as Muscular's elbow grinds down into his chest. Most of his force is on Izuku, but with where Oboro turned solid, he's also trapped under the mass of regenerating and bulging muscles.

Izuku doesn't understand why he doesn't just *let go*. Why he's forcing himself to suffer with Izuku when he can just pull away from Izuku and he'll be massless again. He doesn't have to do it. He doesn't *have* to. Izuku opens his mouth to say as much, but can't seem to find his voice when he catches his friend's gaze.

Oboro's head turns faintly to face Izuku, lips twitching up into a pained half-smile, "ya didn't think I'd let you go, did'ya? We're in this together, 'zuku. Besides, we're only *just* gettin' to know each other! If you die now, I'll track your ass through the afterlife so I can kick it back to life."

Oboro's words are a snarl, but Izuku hears the underlying hysteria. The fear.

The answer to his own question catches Izuku off guard when he finally stumbles on it; *no*, when he falls head first into it. He feels like an idiot for not realizing instantly—

Oboro's a *Hero*. Always has been, and always will be.

They're in this together.

Izuku tries to return the smile, but he doubts it happens. And if it does, he's sure it's more of a grimace.

A splash of water dribbles onto Izuku, shocking his system and dragging him from his thoughts. He hardly has a second to hazily question where *water* came from, when he hears Kota's voice.

He hears the desperation.

He hears the plea.

The fierce determination thundering over the fear—the makings of a Hero.

The water… *Kota's Quirk*. Water Hose. A water-based Quirk just like his parents.

Kota.

Oboro.

He can't die now. There are people he needs to protect. People he needs to *survive* for.

"Use us, Nineth. We're here."

The voice is whispered in the deepest depth of his mind. It's so small, but booming as if it had been screamed. Calm and familiar, penetrating his entire mind. First. That's First's voice.

He hasn't heard from the vestiges at all since he'd been in One for All at the hospital.

More voices clutter his head, and he can hardly hear his own thoughts over it. They're encouraging, determined. He feels One for All without actually activating it. He feels the power—strong and unrelenting despite his battered body. Despite how defeated he feels, and his own wavering exhaustion.

The power buzzing feels like… *more*. There's simply no way to describe it. He's never felt it like this. He's felt one-hundred percent, and this had surpassed it. This… this is so much.

It's like… he feels all of them buzzing through the Quirk. All seven of the past users, of the vestiges trapped in the Quirk, using their own full ability. Lighting the Quirk up simultaneously with everything they know and have learned about the Quirk. Several powerful Quirk users putting their everything into it too—pushing the Quirk to the limits.

The raw power coursing through his veins spurs him on.

This isn't One for All: One-Hundred Percent.

This is *One for All: One-Million Percent*.

Shota had not been expecting to run into a bruised and battered Izuku. Honestly, he's sure the image will be haunting his dreams for the remainder of his life. His kid rushing up to him with Kota on his back, the child's eyes wide and traumatized.

Izuku's limbs are broken and he's muttering so fast Shota can barely piece it all together. Shota's surprised the teen is still standing, let alone ready to charge into the next fight.

It's obvious Izuku had an agenda, spouting information and telling him his plans—but it was equally as obvious he was running on sheer adrenaline.

And then the kid had the nerve to turn and try to *leave*.

It takes one word from Shota for the kid to freeze, stumbling to a stop instead of jumping into a sprint like he'd been preparing to do.

Deep down, Shota knew there was not stopping his kid when he had his mind set on something. Izuku was a spitfire, and a force to reckoned with. Shota can see the adrenaline flickering in the green-haired boy's eyes. It won't be long until it's wavering and he's overcome by exhaustion and pain.

It's really against his better judgment to send his student off again, especially in his state, but he had Kota to be worried about too, and Izuku is a Hero course student. He's a fine pupil and Shota trusts his ability.

Still, it doesn't make his heart ache any less when he watches his injured foster child sprint off in the other direction; heading towards the heart of the attack instead of away from it.

He feels a little bit better after giving Izuku his message to pass onto Mandalay—his permission for them to use their Quirks. It's all he can do with the forest infested with villains and only six Pro Heroes. They need to be able to protect themselves and each other without worrying about repercussions in the future.

He'll deal with the heat of that when it inevitably comes—now he just wants them to survive. They've been training for this. He won't say they're ready for it— no one ever really is ready to face something like this— but he will say he's damn proud of their progress in only a few short months of school. If any of his classes are prepared for this, it's 1-A.

It's only after Izuku is out of sight the Shota realizes he forgot to tell the boy to return after passing along his message. He's not stupid enough to assume Izuku will let his injuries get the better of him, he knows that child will keep going until he can't even hold his head up.

The thought alone scares him.

"Mister..." Shota blinks, reminded of the child he's clutching to his chest. Kota hadn't spoken thus far. He'd been pretty shocked, had hardly looked Shota in the eyes as he'd been handed off. It was to be expected, and Shota really hadn't expected the child to say anything.

He's only five-years-old, and he'd just been witness to a brutal villain attack. He'd witnessed Izuku fighting within the brink of his own life in order to protect him.

Shota lets out a gruff hum in response.

"Is he gonna be okay?"

Shota turns his head to glance down at the boy without stopping moving. The sooner he gets Kota to safety, the sooner he can get back out there and aid. The question catches him off guard, as Kota squeezes around his neck tighter.

"I just... I wasn't very nice to him and-and, he still got beat to a pulp just to protect me. I-I never... I never apologized or even thanked him! Please tell me he's not gonna get hurt more!"

Shota turns the question over in his head a couple times before blowing out a breath and ducking his head in a light nod, "don't worry," Shota finds himself saying, and wishes he could find comfort in his own words, "he sustained those injuries because he has no intention of dying."

The child curls in closer, and Shota feels tears soaking into his capture weapon.

"You'll get your chance to thank him," Shota tells the child, and he prays that to be the truth.

It's quiet for a couple seconds, the only thing to be heard is Shota's own heavy breaths as he runs, and Kota's light sniffles. Shota's sure Mandalay will have her hands full with Kota for a while after this—first his parents and now a villain attack so close to his own home.

“Mister… there was something else…” the boy’s breath fans across the strip of skin not protected by his capture weapon. Shota keeps running as the child pauses, “there was someone else there. A-at my secret base with us.”

Shota’s mind slams to a halt, but he keeps moving. Keeps running. He has to get this child to safety, and then he has to be there for his kids. He can only pray the rest of his class comes out of this better than Izuku had. He shouldn’t have let him go alone.

“Another villain?” Shota finally manages to force out.

The thought of Izuku being in a two against one fight—one of the villains being the behemoth who Izuku reported regenerating his muscle mass and being nearly *undefeatable* due to it… it makes his heart quicken in his chest.

He feels the kid shake his head against his collarbone, and he’s not even sure if the boy is actually shaking his head, or using his jumpsuit to dry his tears. Shota can’t be bothered to care either way. He’s had worse on his Hero costume then tears and snot.

“I don’t know,” the boy whimpers out. “I don’t *think* so.”

Shota almost trips over his own feet at the admission. He catches himself smoothly and keeps going, angling his chin down to show the boy he has his attention. Someone else who’s *not* a villain.

“I… I heard Deku talking to him, I think, but… no one was there, and then I… I heard someone *else*—who *wasn’t* the villain, or Deku. Deku and… and him were talking, b-but I couldn’t really hear them. He was just,” Kota swallows, tucking his face closer to Shota’s neck, “*there*. With Deku. U-under the villain, I think.”

Shota doesn’t know why the thought that someone else was there with his kid prickles at his skin. Who’d been there? It couldn’t possibly be any of his students, he knows for certain none of them would’ve left Izuku in his state. Besides, Kota had seen all the students at this point: he’d be able to tell.

The question is, why hadn’t Izuku reported this same piece of information when he’d passed off Kota? “Where is this person now, Kota? Did he leave you and Deku after the fight?”

“I don’t know!” Shota hears the tears in the boy’s voice, “I-I didn’t even *see* him! I-I don’t even know if he was actually there—Deku said

he didn't see him! B-but he helped us. He was a *good* guy. Then he was gone, and Deku didn't... he didn't *remember* him."

"Didn't remember him?" Shota prompts breathily.

Did Izuku have some sort of head injury? There had been a lot of blood on his foster kid, but he'd seemed alright; looking past the obvious wear and tear from using his overusing his overpowered Quirk, at least.

Or... was Kota imagining things?

It's not unheard of for children in traumatic situations to hallucinate things. He's read case studies of children hearing or seeing things that aren't actually there. Overactive imaginations. Fear responses.

It doesn't make sense: to hear someone who's not there? Someone Izuku doesn't recall. To hear someone, but not *see* them?

"He helped us," Kota wails out instead of an answer, and all Shota can do is hug the boy tighter as he runs, "he-he was like *guardian angel*. Just there when we needed him. B-but he was there! I know he was—I *heard* him! He protected us! He and Deku protected me!"

Shota huffs out a breath, patting at the boy's back where he's holding him.

Guardian angel?

A child-like sentiment.

It's starting to sound more like Kota *put* someone there, instead of someone *being* there. He's only a child after all, he shouldn't have been in this situation in the first place. None of them should've. They're all just kids. Kota, his students, 1-B.

Shota feels silly for even thinking someone could've been there with them. Izuku would've reported another person to him if someone had actually been there. As much as he trusts the word of Kota, the boy is probably in shock. Actually, he *knows* the child is in shock. Rightfully so.

Right now he can't be thinking about whether or not there was someone else in that fight with Izuku. All that matters is that both Izuku and Kota made it out of that fight alive. They're alive and if that's because of some... *guardian angel* Shota can't say he really

believes in (an illogical thought, really), then so be it.

Kota hides his wet face in Shota's shoulder, and the man lets the conversation fall.

When Izuku joins up with his peers: the one with the sentient Quirk, and the one that can duplicate his own limbs, Oboro can finally let out a breath of relief.

As much as he hates the fact that when Izuku is with other living people, he tends to be put on the back burner and ignored, he can't say he's not relieved that there are others who can help him.

Oboro tries, but without Izuku himself, Oboro is as good as useless.

Shoji has Izuku off his feet, protected on his back.

It's clear Izuku's attention is elsewhere now. He's got a goal of getting to Bakugou, and he makes it happen. Oboro can just follow along and observe. Wait and be ready for if he's needed.

He doubts Izuku will call on him—not when he's surrounded by his peers.

But he's ready if it happens.

Soon they find Bakugou and Todoroki, and a while later Uraraka and the girl with the frog Quirk.

Oboro can only watch as the classmate's fight to make it back to camp. Back to safety. He knows better than to talk to Izuku, then to distract him now, so he stays quiet. He watches from the background.

He's glad Izuku has friends he can put his trust in—it makes Oboro miss Shota and Hizashi.

When that guy in the trench coat takes Tokoyami and Bakugou, all hell breaks loose.

Oboro doesn't tend to float often— it's not something he likes to do. He likes to pretend to be as alive as he can, and floating, weightlessly without mass, is a very *not* alive sort of thing. Air travel only works for him if it's on one of his clouds.

But now, in the heat of everything, he doesn't even think about it when he launches himself up after Shoji, Izuku and Todoroki. When

they fling themselves into the air using zero gravity and Asui's tongue. He just goes with them. He won't leave Izuku alone. He refuses.

Oboro stays close to his friend through the chaos of the villains. When the warp gates open, and dread pools in Oboro's stomach. God, could this get any worse?

Oboro decides he really doesn't like the villain in the trench coat when he lets up his illusion and the marbles that Shoji has turn out to be ice. The asshole still has the students. Damnit.

His heart thrums in his chest when Bakugou is revealed, caught in the blue-fire Quirked man's hand. Izuku screams for his friend, launching towards him despite his injuries.

Oboro is on Izuku's heels as the broken boy rushes towards the closing warp gate in an attempt to grab Bakugou. It's closing so fast—Izuku leaps and right before it closes, a hand darts out from the purple void and four fingers grasp around the boy's wrist.

Those same fingers, that same *hand*, that haunts Oboro's mind every time he shuts his eyes. The hand that had closed around the boy's neck at the mall, threatening to decay him.

"No!" Oboro pushes forwards, reaching for his friend.

"Well, well, well," that gravelly voice calls, but the decaying villain's face doesn't surface. The portal is closing fast, Izuku tugged in just as it closes, "looks like this level rewarded me greatly. Target acquired and a little gift for me for playing as well. Level complete."

Oboro sees Izuku's wide eyes, face twisted in pain as he's tugged roughly through the remaining, tiny opening of the portal.

"Izuku!" Oboro screams out, hand reaching out to grab the boy.

No, no, *no*!

The ghost reaches his hand out. He launches to grab the boy, throws himself at the void.

He has to grab him. He has to.

Oboro is so close to the black and purple swirling void—he's so close to being there.

So close to grabbing Izuku, or stepping through to be with him.

He has to make it—

The portal closes and Oboro hits the ground harder than he even thought he could as a ghost without a body. He drags himself to his hands and knees just as fast as he'd hit the ground, gaze darting around to spot any sign of that portal, but he doesn't see anything.

Not so much as a granule.

He's... he's gone.

The villains have Izuku, and Oboro hadn't stopped it.

"Fuck!"

Chapter End Notes

> This chapter was mostly supposed to be a filler chapter to bridge the gap between last chapter and the upcoming, since it felt wrong to just jump into the next chapter, so, sorry if it's repetative with the anime! I tried to spice it up, but there's not much I can do! I hope it came out alright!
>
> Now, I hope ya'll are excited for the next chapter, because that's where we'll stray from the anime path for a bit! :)
>
> Anyways! As always, comments are very greatly appreciated! I love reading your guys' thoughts, opinions and reactions to this stuff! Lemme know what you guys thought! Hopefully this was a good plot twist! :D

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

So, I had fun with this chapter :)

I'm going to warn you guys now that there are some time jumps in this chapter! I'll be making them in italics, and I've hopefully worded them right so you'll be able to tell it's past tense, but just know that paragraphs of italics mean it's sort of flash backs. I wasn't sure how to make it flow without the flash backs, but I hope nothing's to confusing!

Anyways, onwards to this new chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota's eyes glare at the clock across from him.

He's sat in a hospital waiting room, dread pooling in his stomach as he clutches the landline phone the receptionist had so graciously allowed him to use in one hand. He has everything he needs to call Hizashi, but he still hesitates.

It's nearing the early hours in the morning, a perfectly reasonable time to be calling his husband, considering Hizashi will already be up and about, probably getting ready for patrol. He's an early bird.

Still, Shota can't seem to make his fingers dial the numbers to his husband's cellphone. He can't seem to force his limbs to do *anything*. The phone hangs in a limp hand, and his other hand flattens over the keypad on the landline.

His fingers itch to press the buttons of the familiar number, but he just can't *move*.

The attack on the training camp had come out of nowhere.

Multiple villains had taken over the forest and attacked a bunch of fifteen-year-olds. Who does that? Who targets *kids*?

It had taken *hours* to round up all the students after the villains seemed to just *stop* and *disappear* suddenly, all forty of them in various

stages of consciousness, quite a few injured and all with haunted, blank looks in their eyes. Or, the ones conscious at least.

For half of the students, Vlad's 1-B kids, this is the first actual villain attack they've encountered. Shota remembers seeing the looks on their faces on his own kids after the USJ attack, but even having seen these looks before, it never makes it easier. The hollowness in their gazes, almost unseeing.

Thrown head first into the world of Heroes and Villains.

Shota's own kids weren't much better.

Shoji, Todoroki, Uraraka, Asui and Tokoyami had seemed to come out of this the worst of most of his students; haunted eyes with something sickeningly aghast in their gazes.

He'd asked what happened, mind cluttered with tasks and worries, but trying to get them his full attention. It's strangely upsetting how quiet his usually loud and rambunctious students are in that moment. Worrying.

None had said much when Shota had finally gotten his hands on them, hurriedly checking them over before ushering a bleeding Shoji and a still unconscious 1-B student towards a waiting ambulance while he directed the others to join everyone else while the round-up commenced. There were still students to find and villains to capture, and he could deal with the trauma later.

He didn't have time to pry into them when there was still students missing.

For now, he'd let medical personnel and trained officers look after his students.

One by one they'd found the students.

Some unconscious in the woods due to that gas Quirk that the students had reported. Some curled into themselves guarding over unconscious villains. Tetsutetsu from 1-B even had *bullet holes*, but was thankfully mostly unharmed due to his Quirk. Most of the students sported scrapes and bruises, but the majority weren't seriously injured.

Small mercies in the scheme of things.

Well, unless being unconscious counted, then a lot of the students were down for the count.

Shota had scoured the forest for the students, along with police and rescue services. Every student found was a tiny weight off his shoulder, but even those tiny bouts of relief couldn't make up for the fact they'd been attack by villains. *Again*.

They'd found the students. Most of them. *Thirty-eight* of them. There'd been missing two students, and a bitter taste had filled his mouth before he'd even returned back to the lodge where the kids were waiting to do a head count of who was still unaccounted for.

Fear swirls in Shota's stomach when he finally makes it back to the lodge.

The students are all patiently waiting, those injured and unconscious already loaded into ambulances and on their way to the hospital for treatment, while everyone else sat packed in together in little friend groups. The sight of his students huddled together is one he probably won't ever forget— they've never looked so young before.

Shota's churning stomach turns acidic when Izuku's message from earlier, passed on by Mandalay, echoes through his mind, *'We have discovered one of the villain's targets. It is one of the students—Kacchan!'* the thought of it now makes him sick.

Especially since...

-

"Has anyone seen Bakugou?" Shota had called loudly over those conscious and well enough to take one of the busses to the hospital.

The dread had pooled tenfold in his stomach as Uraraka's lip wobbled and Tokoyami turned away from him guiltily. Todoroki's expression had been grim, but emotionless and Asui had curled into herself even more where she'd been hugging her knees to her chest.

Shota swallowed, trying to keep his voice neutral despite the panic, "or Midoriya?"

-

He'd known then that something was very, very wrong. Izuku's friend group without Izuku? Those haunted, crestfallen expressions? How

none of those four students seemed to be able to look him in the eye?

Shota should've known better than to be optimistic that they'd find Izuku and Bakugou hidden away in a bush, safe and sound. Or, even to find them unconscious on the forest ground. Anything was better than the dark thoughts snaking deeper into his mind as he stares at his wilted students.

The last he'd seen his foster kid, Izuku had been barreling towards the heart of the attack. Keen on finding Mandalay and delivering both his own message for his classmates, as well as Shota's order for them to *fight back*. Shota knew nothing would stop the kid from getting to Bakugou—but where the hell *is* Bakugou?

Shota could only pray both of them would show up in somewhere. The forest was huge. Maybe, just *maybe*, they'd gotten lost. Strayed from the path. Had gotten off track and ended up lost in the depths of the forest together. *Maybe.*

There had been nine ambulances surrounding them that had shown up fairly fast. Shota doesn't know who'd made the call—probably one the Pussycats—but he's relieved when reinforcements arrive.

Along with the ambulances, six police cars arrived, as well as two fire trucks—not to mention the dozens of water-based Quirks working rapidly in an attempt to contain the raging hell-fire spreading swiftly through the trees.

Midway into the search— roughly half the students located and sent either to the ambulances or the lodge where conscious, relatively uninjured students are waiting— two separate search and rescue units arrive in, as well as a couple additional Heroes turning up to aid in rescue and first-aid.

And, as if that weren't already *bad enough*, Vlad receives exactly two calls from Nezu, both of which aren't even noticed with both teachers actively scouring the forest with search and rescue in a hurried attempt to locate those still unaccounted for students.

Shota's sure his phone, where ever it is, will also have missed calls from the rat too.

If Nezu knew about the attack at that point, while they were still in the process of finding kids, arresting villains, putting out the fire and treating injuries, Shota knew it wouldn't be long until this is on the news. Until the media sinks its teeth into this. Until everything comes

to light, including Pro Hero negligence. Sekijiro's negligence. The Pussycat's negligence. And most *importantly*, Shota's own negligence. He was supposed to be there. He was supposed to keep the safe, and he *hadn't*.

God, what a fucking mess.

The man slumps down further in his seat, drawing in a heaving breath as he thumbs at aching eyes.

His eye solution had gotten lost somewhere in the mess of the fight, or even in the rounding up of traumatized high schoolers. Honestly, his eye drops are probably in the same place his cell phone is. Where ever the hell that is.

Shota lets his head thump back against the wall as he blows out a shaky breath. He really shouldn't be putting this call off like he is. It's illogical. There are more important things he can be doing instead of this.

He needs to be with his students.

He needs to be getting into contact with guardians.

He needs to talk to Nezu, and the police, and doctors and his kids. He wants to check in with them all, assess them with his own two eyes and be *thankful* they're all alright.

He's itching to do another head count of his students; desperate for his class count to make it to twenty instead of that sickening eighteen that had speared through his heart like a dagger. He knows it won't. But he can't help but pray he miscounted somehow, even though he's well aware the change in scenery won't magically make his numbers add up.

He feels like the worst teacher in existence as he sits here, worried about a *phone call* while his kids are injured, and unconscious, and have been through one hell of a fight that they're still too young to be dealing with.

How has his class of first-years seen more action than the third years graduating this year?

There's so much he needs to be doing, so why is he having such a hard time contacting Hizashi? This, *logically*, should be the easiest thing on his to-do list. It's Hizashi. His husband. He's called Hizashi hundreds

of times—if not thousands in all the years they've known each other.

This time shouldn't be different.

But it *is*.

Why does he not want to tell his husband?

Hizashi deserves to know Shota lost not just two of his students, but that one of their students was their foster son. Hizashi deserves to know.

Shota snakes a hand up to drag through his knotted hair before he's sitting up. His fingers hover over the keypad before he finally bites the bullet and dials Hizashi's cell number slowly.

It rings three times before the call is answered.

"Hellooo?" his husband's voice greets cheerfully through the receiver, and Shota can just draw in a stutter breath. He can't force himself to speak yet; words caught in his lungs as he listens to Hizashi on the other end of the phone. Hizashi is quiet for all of three seconds, and when he finally speaks again, Shota can hear the confusion in his voice, "hello? Who is this?"

"'zashi..." Shota greets blandly, fingers shaking as he holds the phone to his ear. The call of his husband's name tastes acidic, but Shota knows Hizashi will hang up if no one says anything. Especially since he's calling from an unknown number.

"Sho?" his husband chirps happily in reply. Shota winces at the sound, heart dropping into his stomach. His mouth is dry, and he desperately wants to talk, but can't seem to find his own voice. "Oh, hey! What's up, babe? Why aren't you calling from your cell?"

Shota opens his mouth to reply, but it shuts just as fast. His grip on the phone tightens to the point he thinks he might actually crack the hard plastic. He loosens his grip.

"Wait— what are you even calling me for?" Hizashi's tone curls into one of playful accusation, "I thought reception up at the lodge was bad? Miss me so much you needed to hear my voice?"

"Hizashi," Shota croaks out his husband's full name, a rarity. His voice cracks, and he squeezes his aching eyes shut. They're red, and dry, and irritated. Shota just knows that if he had any moisture left in

them, he'd be crying.

"Hey. Hey, hey, hey. Shota? Wait a sec, a-are you... Sweetheart, what's wrong? Are you alright? Did something happen at bootcamp? Did 'zuku break another bone? Are you calling from the hospital...? I thought that number looked familiar! Is he okay?"

Shota can't manage to say anything, but he does try to draw in a shaky breath. He drags the hand not holding the phone down his face, choking on his words as he tries to contain his emotions in the not-so-private reception area.

"Shota..." Hizashi says lowly, seriously. The blonde-haired man draws in his own anxious breath on the other end of the line, and Shota knows—he *knows* his husband has figured out this isn't a curtesy call. "Sho... what... where's Izuku? Put him on the phone."

-

"They took them, Sensei," Uraraka had whispered brokenly, so softly that Shota had to strain to hear. And when he did make the words out, replaying the soft admission in his head three times before it finally clicked, his mind froze like someone had dropped a bucket of ice water right over his head.

Shota lets the word sink in for another long second before he dumbly responds. "What?"

"The villains," Todoroki clarifies— even though Shota really hadn't been asking— eyes locked on the ground, "the villains took Bakugou and Midoriya. We weren't fast enough... We lost them."

-

"There was an attack," Shota finally chokes out, digging the heel of his palm into his itchy eye. "Last night. The League of Villains. We were ambushed. There were new Quirks, Hizashi. New villains. They... they targeted the students. There was some kind of poisonous vapor Quirk that knocked students out, and bloodthirsty villains. Most of the kids were hurt, and more than half of them lost consciousness... we... I-I... fuck—"

"Shota," the blonde croaks desperately, "please— *please* tell me that everyone is safe—"

"'m so sorry," Shota wipes furiously at his eyes, those three words

soaked with distraught, “they have him, ‘zash. They got Izuku, and they got Bakugou, and I— *fuck*, I don’t... I didn’t protect them, Hizashi. They took my kids. They took *two* of my kids.”

“The Quirk you have now is unique, and you should know it’s origin.”

Izuku looks across the coffee table at All Might, a frown pulling on his lips. It’s the first time he’s really seen the Pro since Hosu, and Izuku’s encounter with the Hero Killer. He sees All Might in classes, but with both of their schedules so hectic, they barely have a moment to talk.

Izuku leans into the conversation; this is the first time All Might had really talked about One for All. Izuku knows how it’s passed, by DNA, and he knows it’s haunted by past users, but there’s so much he doesn’t know about this age-old Quirk.

He can’t say he’s never been curious; he’s had questions about it since before receiving it on the day of the Entrance Exam, but he’s also never wanted to push. He believes in All Might, and he knows his Hero will tell him what he needs to know, when he needs to know it.

“One for All was derived from another odd Quirk, a power that’s very old.”

Izuku pauses at the information, “it used to be something different?”

All Might bows his head in a solemn nod. The Pro studies Izuku for a long second before finally continuing, “that name of that Quirk is All for One. It allowed its user to take Quirks from others and the user could keep the Quirks for himself or give them to someone else.”

Izuku has spent a lot of years studying Quirks, and he’s never heard of anything like that... but, then again, he’d also never heard of being able to transfer a Quirk via DNA. Still, the idea of being able to take someone’s Quirk is a scary one, especially in a period where Quirks are essentially power. “Y-you mean he could steal Quirks?”

All Might had gone on to tell Izuku about when Quirks first started appearing hundreds of years ago. Some of the information he knew from Pre-Quirk, and Quirk History classes, while some of the information was new.

He’d have never thought there could be anyone as powerful at this supposed All for One out there. He’d hardly heard of All for One, not anywhere besides online forums. Izuku can hardly wrap his head around this man, who could do what seemed like the impossible.

An overlord of the villain world, a threat no one even knows truly existed...

"I-I've seen rumors about this online, sure, but..." Izuku bites the inside of his cheek, "isn't that all just made up? It's not mentioned in our textbooks, or talked about in class."

All Might sits up straighter before his shoulders slump slightly, "because that's the kind of shameful history people would rather ignore."

All Might lets the explanation hang in the air for a second, and Izuku tries to process it.

"How does this all tie together though?" Izuku asks, even though he's starting to piece it all together. "And what about One for All?"

"I said All for One could give Quirks to others, remember?"

The Pro goes on to tell Izuku about All for One's Quirk and motives in more detail. How some people can handle Quirks being taken or given and others turn into mindless living dolls... like the Nomu.

Izuku had never suspected that those creatures could've at one point been people.

It had never once crossed his mind.

The thought of it makes him feel sick. Humans, actual human beings being turned into... science experiments? Into mindless soldiers for Shigaraki?

He tells Izuku of how some Quirks combined, and strengthened, and Izuku has a feeling he knows where this conversation is going.

All Might carries on to tell him of two brothers. One with a powerful Quirk, and the other Quirkless. The more Izuku hears, the more things are starting to slot into place with what he already knows. About One for All. Izuku listens intently, absorbing all the information.

It makes sense in some sick kind of way.

Everything was falling into place. He was starting to understand.

"Don't tell me..." Izuku whispers as All Might speaks of the brother of All for One, describes him broadly, but Izuku's mind instantly flashes back to First, the young, sickly-looking man who'd been in One for All at the hospital with him.

First was... this villain's brother? All for One. One for All. Brothers.

Izuku feels sick.

"Yes, even though everyone thought he was Quirkless, turns out the brother did have a Quirk. Though even he hadn't realized this to be the case. He had a useless power that only allowed him to pass on Quirks."

Izuku stares, wide-eyed as All Might finishes his story, "and so, the stockpiling Quirk merged with the younger brother's power and that is how One for All came to be."

Izuku swallows down the anxious churn of his stomach as he tries to make sense of the information he was given. The warning to watch out for All for One. A reminder that he's alive, and that he's out there.

A lot of it makes sense, though if he could correct one thing after meeting All for One's brother, he'd say that the Quirk didn't merge with First's power, but with First himself.

Izuku swallows down the memory—the explanation.

The... the *warning*.

That's what it had been. At the time, Izuku hadn't thought anything of it. All Might had simply been explaining the villain to him. Explaining the Quirk that was now a part of him to him. How One for All was connected to this apparent villain world overlord: All for One. It had felt like nothing more than a story at the time.

But now, roped up and slumped against a wall in the villain's lair, he's starting to see it for what it really had been. All Might had been warning him about All for One. Warning about his power, about the dangers.

And Izuku hadn't heeded it.

He'd hardly given it a second thought really—had brushed the villain to the depths of his mind until faced with Shigaraki. He honestly hadn't thought about his conversation with All Might until the mall incident where he'd all but begged Shigaraki for an answer that the villain either hadn't honestly known, or hadn't felt like sharing.

All for One really must still be alive, even though he never doubted All Might. It's just... a lot to accept. Someone living for over two-hundred years? But he really is still alive— creating Nomus, and leading Shigaraki along as a mentor... training him to be the next

biggest threat Japan has seen.

Izuku stirs against his restraints, wincing and sucking in a pained wheeze through his teeth as his bounds jostle his injuries.

He's not sure how long he's been here at this point; sat slumped against the wall. The pain of his injuries being tugged and his body being yanked without regard, accompanied by the fact that void-travel certainly wasn't *pleasant*, had made him pass out—when he'd woken again, he'd already been tied up and was left almost completely alone in a dark, seedy looking bar of some sort.

He can only assume it's sometime in the day if this bar is lifeless. He supposes if the villains are more active at night they'd probably sleep more during the day, and then there was the fact that bars don't tend to open until the evening anyways.

It's still questionable how much business this bar gets—Izuku can only imagine a seedy looking bar like this would be buried in the depths of the shady parts of town. A villain hideout that caters to other villains and lowlifes.

Despite his injuries, they'd still felt the need to tie him up. Two broken arms, a black eye that he can barely see out of, obvious Quirk exhaustion and plain old normal exhaustion, and they'd still thought it necessary to tie him up.

They'd been kind enough to let him keep the makeshift splints on his arms that kept the injuries straight and aligned, so they weren't entirely incapacitating due to sharp pain. Now, as Izuku stares down at his blurry arms, he's so glad Uraraka had thought to do this for him. It had been a spur of the moment thing, she and their friends searching out long, straight sticks and tying them to Izuku's arms with Uraraka's torn shirt binding the sticks in place.

The relief of it had been almost instant, but now he's afraid it's not helping as much. His adrenaline had faded, and he's exhausted and sore. If he hadn't of gotten himself kidnapped too, he's sure he'd probably be in the hospital right now. Maybe even with Hizashi and Shota at his sides...

Still, he'll have to remember thank Uraraka for her quick thinking when he gets out of here.

...*if* he gets out of here.

They were still afraid of what he could do, even when he doubts he'll be able to do *anything*.

He can hardly feel his body, let alone stand and walk away.

Besides, even if he could get himself out of his restraints, manage to force himself up and leave; there's a flaw to that logic.

Izuku turns his head to the side, where Kacchan is unconscious. He's muzzled, chained to his chair. Izuku feels bad that his childhood friend is physically chained, fully restrained and immobile, when Izuku himself is bound with ropes that if he had just a little more strength, and a couple less broken limbs, he'd easily be able to escape.

He won't leave Kacchan.

His sole intention when he'd surged for the void had been to get to Kacchan. Ideally, he would've preferred to pull Kacchan back with him, instead of being grabbed and pulled along with the villains, but you can't win them all.

Perhaps he's not as scary when he's injured and can hardly move on his own. Who would've thought?

"Ah, it appears you're awake," Izuku jolts up, wincing as his weary eyes land on the owner of the voice. "I apologize, Midoriya Izuku, but Shigaraki Tomura is currently resting. We didn't anticipate you waking quite yet."

The man walks calmly behind the bar, where he sets to work as if there aren't two children tied up off to the side of the room. He's organizing glass bottles of alcohol arranged on the shelving units behind the counter, as well as wiping out what looks to be freshly washed glasses with a white towel and stacking them under the counter.

"W-what..." Izuku swallows, his throat so dry that the words feel like sandpaper, "what time is it?"

"Time?" the villain hums thoughtfully, "it's just after three PM. I'm afraid you still have a bit of a wait until Shigaraki Tomura wakes—it was a rather long night for him and the others, as I'm sure you've noticed."

Izuku swallows again, and shifts until he's fully facing the bar where the villain works quietly. He hadn't expected any civil conversation

when he'd first woken up and realized where he was. He'll take what he can get. Villains not trying to kill him is a step up from what he's seen so far as a hero-in-training.

Izuku tries to keep his noises to himself as he shifts around, but pain surges up his arms and settles at his core. He's never had to just *live* with broken limbs like this.

He must not be quiet enough, as yellow eyes flicker in his direction, and it seems like the villain is almost... *pondering*.

"It seems like you also had a rather rough night as well," he comments idly like he'd just taken notice of Izuku's state. "I take it you were the one to run into Muscular. Not many of our members can do such damage. It's rather impressive that you walked out of that fight alive, Midoriya Izuku. As expected of a Yuuei student, I suppose."

Something about how the villain says his name—thoughtful and accusing all the same— makes a chill crawl up his spine. He has half a mind to turn away from the villain's direction, but he also doesn't want to show any weakness. He's already battered, he doesn't want to look *weak* too.

The villain's yellow eyes watch him for a second longer before his attention is dropping back to where he's toweling a glass dry, "and if that's the case, I assume you're the reason Muscular was not at the getaway meeting spot, meaning you must have defeated him somehow."

Izuku swallows nervously at the accusatory hum.

He waits for the villain to stalk towards him; ready to threaten him or beat him for taking out one of their members—he even winces when a cup is set on the counter with a faint *click* of glass hitting hardwood.

The villain makes no move to come any closer, and after a long second of nothing moving, Izuku slivers his eyes open to see the villain hasn't moved an inch from his spot; had simply reached for the next glass to towel.

The villain clicks his tongue distastefully, "he was nothing but extra hands anyways—to focused on his own agenda instead of Shigaraki Tomura's. Oh well, it seems he's the police's problem now."

Izuku's not sure how someone can sound so spiteful yet devoid of any and all emotion at the same time.

Ruthless, is all Izuku can think. They'd lost members, but this villain doesn't seem to bothered. He doubts any of the villains will be. He wonders how the ranking works, if no one cares that they're down at least one, if not *more*, if his classmates were as successful as he was, of their members.

The boy ducks his chin down, swallowing nervously. The action tickles at the back of his dry throat, prompting a cough that he tries to contain. The little cough turns into a full fit that brings tears to his eyes. He tries desperately to swallow them down, but it doesn't work.

"How rude of me. You're our guest." The villain sighs, setting the towel on the countertop as he turns, with the glass in his hand, to the sink, "I'll get you some water. I would hate for you to wake up Shigaraki Tomura."

Izuku's coughing fit is just dying down when the villain finally rounds the bar counter with a glass of water that makes Izuku's mouth water. Or it would if his body had any moisture to give.

The villain pauses once again, just before stepping out from behind the bar with a filled glass of water. Izuku watches as it looks like the villain is bluescreening, staring ahead at nothing before he's turning to look at Izuku. His eyes don't change, but Izuku swears the villain is *squinting* at him, "you must be in pain."

The boy isn't sure whether he should admit the weakness, or pretend it's not true. How are you supposed to act when you're being held captive? This hadn't been in any Heroics classes yet. Was there a manual for being held hostage?

He doesn't have to decide either way, because without a word, the villain is setting the glass of water on the edge of the counter and turning to disappear into the room he surfaced from.

Izuku can't help the fear that digs it's claws into his heart as he's left alone with Kacchan again. What could the villain be doing in the other room? Was Shigaraki awake? Was it *starting*? He'd assumed they were in a state of *limbo* while the League of Villain leader slept. Was that over?

Izuku licks at his own dry lips, eyes settling on the glass of water despite how his mind is trying to push down his own desperate need of water, not trusting the villain in the slightest.

He now realizes just how desperate he truly is for the water that sits

just on the edge of the counter—teasing him. It's there: right *there* in front of him... but so far. Out of reach. Was this just a game? A villain waving something his body is desperately begging for in front of his face because it's *fun*?

The door opens again, and Izuku braces for the worst.

Except it's just the void-Quirk villain returning. Izuku shifts a little to glance around the villain, to see if anyone's following him, but he's alone. And he only gets a peek into the other room before the door swings shut. He can only imagine Shigaraki and the rest of the League of Villains are sleeping somewhere back there.

"Here we are," the villain says in way of announcing his return. "This should help."

In his hand is a pill bottle.

Dread pools in Izuku's stomach as he watches the villain shake out a couple pills before recapping the bottle and sliding it into the pocket of his trousers. With his newly empty second hand, the villain picks up the glass of water and moves towards Izuku.

"It's not much," the villain hums out indifferently as he crouches in front of Izuku. Izuku doesn't think the villain is trying to be threatening, but he *is*. "But it's better than nothing, I suppose."

"Some kind of drugs?" Izuku winces back when the villain's hand holds out two pills. "You're *drugging* me? Sorry, but I'd rather be in pain then be drugged."

"Drugging you?" the villain's voice twists with confusion, "certainly not."

The villain withdraws the pill bottle he'd tucked into his pocket and Izuku narrows his eyes at the 'Advil' label. He was being offered... Advil? What the hell?

"Ibuprofen." The villain offers matter-of-factly, as if Izuku hadn't just read the label. "We may be villains, Midoriya Izuku, but we aren't invincible. Even villains suffer from headaches, fevers and injuries. It's regular over the counter Advil; I like to keep it on hand for Shigaraki Tomura and his friends. It's not much, I'm afraid— your injuries appear to be quite bad—" the villain looks like he's about to make some comment about Izuku's injuries being hospital worthy, but seems to think better of it, "but it will help a bit with the pain."

Izuku stares suspiciously, but the villain doesn't appear to be fazed by it.

Yellow, flickering eyes stare unseeingly into tired deep green. Izuku drops his eyes down to the two small pills held outstretched, and then to the glass of water before he's looking back up at the void-granulated face of this villain. "Are you supposed to be doing this?"

It didn't make sense.

They should want him to be in pain—he's being held *captive*. Shigaraki wants to *kill* him, and he'd made that perfectly clear after his parting words at the mall. That was the *vibe* he'd given off as he walked away. Why would this villain be offering him pain relief?

The villain cocks his head to the side, "you're our guest as of now. Until Shigaraki Tomura decides what to do with you. You are, after all, a special *interest* of his. You were not our target, merely a reward that Shigaraki Tomura selected."

"I wasn't the target," Izuku glares down at his lap, "but Bakugou was. Why?"

The villain regards him, but does not answer.

Izuku frowns at that as he lifts his head again to look at the villain, changing his approach, "will Shigaraki be upset you're helping me?"

"I was never told *not* to help you," the villain blinks slowly, "and this hardly counts as aid. Advil is hardly a decent pain relief for injuries such as yours. The relief you'll feel will be minimal."

Izuku shifts against the ropes tying him to the leg of Kacchan's chair.

Truthfully, if that really is Advil, it won't help much. As this villain said, it will hardly help with the pain. He's in so much pain, and he's fresh out of adrenaline. His body's just begging to sleep, so he's really not a flight risk at this point.

"The decision is entirely yours. You'll be sitting for a long while as of now. Shigaraki Tomura and his friends will not be waking until this evening. The Advil will just take the edge off and ease your pain a small amount; besides, even with a little bit of pain relief, you're still tied up. Your arms will still be broken. And..." the villain pauses, yellow eyes flicking to a still unconscious Kacchan, "I highly doubt you'll make an escape without your friend. That would be

counterproductive considering you tried to run *in* to my void instead of *away* from it, simply because Dabi had a hold of Bakugou Katsuki."

Izuku's nose wrinkles as he squints at the villain still crouched in front of him.

It's all true.

But still, he's annoyed this villain is pointing it all out—laying out Izuku's entire thought process without much of his own thought. The ability to read him like an open book almost reminds him of his guardians. Of Oboro.

Very few people are able to actually read him, and it sucks that this villain is one of them.

Izuku wilts as a desperate feeling of loneliness and longing tugs at his heart. He misses them. He wishes more than anything that Oboro was here with him. That had been the biggest shock when he'd woken up on the floor in some villain bar/lair. That he was *alone*.

"You do not need to take them," the villain finally says after a long second of the two of them just staring at each other. "It's merely an *offer*. I don't care either way, Midoriya Izuku. You are not who I am here to protect; it is of no difference to me whether or not you take the pain relief."

Izuku swallows again, looking down once more between the hand of pills and the hand holding the glass of water. He desperately wants both— but the question is: does he trust this villain's word?

It's not smart to take any sort of pill from a stranger, let alone a known *villain*. But at what point does that stop mattering? At what point does desperation take over and cloud your judgement? The pain will just get worse from here on out, at what point do you take the 'L' when you're being held against your will with multiple broken limbs that hurt to the point it blurs your vision?

"Who... who are you?" Izuku manages out as he eyes the glass in the villain's hand. It's silly that he thinks he feel even just a little better when he has a name for the villain, if the villain gives him that much, at least.

Even without a name, Izuku is still leaning towards taking the villain up on his offer. The water is crystal clear, and the glass a shiny, sparkly clean. The care put into the bar counter doesn't match the

general atmosphere of the rest of the bar.

It's just so tempting—he hadn't had water since at least yesterday morning, if the villain had been honest about the current time. Izuku had done a lot of training with very few breaks, and then he'd been thrown into that fight with Muscular. The only water he'd had was Kota's water Quirk splashing onto his face.

"Ah, my apologies," the villain's thin yellow eyes flicker with understanding, "my name is Kurogiri. I am here to watch over Shigaraki Tomura, and I run this bar in my spare time."

Patience flows from the man in waves.

It's strangely... *not* villainous. This level of calm patience is not what Izuku thinks of when he thinks of the word 'villain'. Izuku knows he's being a handful—being so obviously mistrusting (rightfully so considering the situation), but still, the man doesn't waver, or retract his offer. He stays crouched; calm and collected. There's not a hint of annoyance, or frustration. It's... *weird*.

Finally, Izuku gives a tiny nod.

His throat is so dry it aches, and his arms jolt pain through his body at every breath. He wants to take the edge off, even if he doesn't have high hopes the Advil will really do as suggested. He's desperate enough that he's willing to put just an ounce of trust into this villain.

Or, maybe the villain is lying and he'll be drugged. At this point, he's not sure which outcome he'd *rather*. Neither seems much better than the other—being drugged, but potentially being pain free, or not being drugged, but living with injuries that will only get worse the longer they're untreated.

If Shota, Hizashi and Oboro ever find out, he's probably dead meat, but now... now he's desperate.

For a second, Kurogiri doesn't move even after Izuku's consenting nod. He holds both the pill and the glass out just before him before finally seeming to realize Izuku is in no state to grab anything—both because of his broken arms, and the fact he's still tied up.

"Ah," Kurogiri finally mutters, and then his hand is lifting the two pills to Izuku's mouth.

The teenager wrinkles his nose as he hesitates one final time before

throwing caution to the wind as he opens his mouth just enough for the villain to pop the pills in. Following that, Kurogiri lifts the glass to Izuku's lips with a surprising amount of gentleness.

Izuku chases the pills down with a cautious, mistrusting sip of the water before his desperate instincts kick in and he's greedily drinking the full glass with the villain's help. He can almost hear Shota's grumbling disapproval in the back of his mind as he blindly trusts the villain.

He doesn't taste anything weird in the water, not that he'd know even if there was something off about it. He'd seen it come directly from the tap, and the glass hadn't left his sights, but he's still wary. He was so desperate for water that he's sure any water would've tasted as good as that water did.

When the water is gone, Kurogiri stands up to his full height. He stares down at Izuku with unblinking yellow void-like eyes, but doesn't say anything. His fingers hold the rim of the empty glass, and his other hand tucked in the pocket of his slacks.

Izuku feels small under the villain's intimidating glance.

Almost as if reading Izuku's thoughts, Kurogiri turns on his heels and makes his way back behind the counter. He resumes his task of tidying the bar, eyes never straying from what he's doing. It's like he's completely unbothered by the fact there are two high school students being held hostage.

Repetitive sounds fill the silence of the bar. Fingers swiping across wet glass as the villain picks them up, inspects them, and then towels them dry. The clinking of glasses and glass bottles of alcohol as he puts everything away, presumably preparing for when the bar opens this evening. Glass sliding on the countertops and shelves as they're arranged. The villain's footsteps as he tidies.

It's almost calming.

But it's also *not*.

Ropes and captivity are not calming. A chained up, unconscious childhood friend is not calming. Two broken arms are not calming.

Not knowing what's waiting for him and Kacchan just around the corner, this evening when Shigaraki and his team of villains finally wake up, is *not* calming.

This is anything *but* calming.

Slowly but surely the Advil starts to take effect.

It doesn't do much, but the pain isn't as sharp and demanding as it had been when Izuku woke. He still hurts. He aches. He wishes desperately for a hospital and real numbing medications, or for a kiss from Recovery Girl to mend the breaks—but even then, he's not sure he's got the stamina for it.

The difference now from earlier is so miniscule that Izuku barely notices it, but he knows it really is taking a faint edge of pain away.

The boy glares down at his broken arms distastefully before his eyes flit to his childhood friend. It's surprising Kacchan hasn't stirred yet. He should be yelling, and screaming, but he's still out. It's worrying.

"What happened to my friend?" Izuku tears his gaze away from Kacchan, looking to where Kurogiri has glanced up at him at his breaking of the silence. The villain looks between the two of them, eyes not moving but head lulling between them.

"Same thing that happened to you," Kurogiri offers calmly, "travel via my Quirk takes some getting used to. It's quite the strain on the body to not only be consumed by my void, especially against your will, but to also step from one place to another in a matter of seconds. It's a bit of a shock. Exhaustion also played a role in the toll it seemed to take on you and Bakugou Katsuki. Unfortunately, neither of you held onto consciousness. Shigaraki Tomura was most upset upon your arrival."

The villain pauses, glancing to the doorway he'd surfaced from and disappeared through to get the Advil before looking back at Izuku, "I confess that that is the only reason I managed to get him and the others to have a rest after such a long night; they were very much looking forward to properly meeting you both."

"So you guys didn't... *do* anything to him?"

Kurogiri eyes him, or Izuku *thinks* he's eyeing him, "no, we did not. Magne and Dabi merely tied the both of you up before everyone stepped away to rest. I assured them I'd keep a close eye on the both of you."

Izuku is quiet for a second. "Why did you take us? Why take Bakugou? Why take *me*?"

The villain hesitates.

"...why us?"

"Sensei and Shigaraki Tomura have plans for Bakugou Katsuki. He was our goal going into that attack on your training camp—" and didn't those words make Izuku's stomach violently churn, "—as for you... I'm afraid I don't know what Shigaraki Tomura has in store. His decision was a spur of the moment one."

"I was a convenience catch," Izuku breathes out.

Kurogiri doesn't say anything for a long second before he finally bows his head in a nod, "Shigaraki Tomura is interested in you, and he has been since our attack on the USJ. Sensei does not share the sentiment. Frankly, I doubt he's even aware we have two Yuuei students here. It is quite the bold move but... Shigaraki Tomura knows what he's doing."

Izuku can only assume that Sensei and All for One are the same person —and if that's correct, he's relieved that the villain world overlord doesn't know he's here. All for One knows about One for All, but if Izuku's correct, he probably thinks All Might still has complete possession of the Quirk.

Thank goodness.

He'd be screwed if All for One knew he had the current One for All wielder in this bar with his organization of villains. Shigaraki obviously knows All for One if he'd known what Izuku was talking about when the villain departed at the mall.

Hopefully no one knows that Izuku's the current wielder. Hopefully no one even *knows* the secret of One for All around here.

They lapse into silence after that, and Izuku doesn't bother trying to keep the conversation going. He has questions, of course he does, but Kurogiri is selective about what he'll answer. Izuku's not quite sure what the pattern is—why the villain will be open and honest about some answers, but closed off and hesitant about others.

And he really doesn't want to push his luck. Sure, Kurogiri has been nice thus far, but that's not to say the he won't snap at some point. He's a villain after all. He may be able to lull Izuku into a sort of state of false security, but he's still a *villain*. He still works for Shigaraki.

Kurogiri doesn't seem bothered by the silence, not that Izuku expected him to be.

The villain just carries on milling around behind the bar as the minutes tick on.

For a while, Izuku just watches him.

Observes what he's doing, observes the bar they're in, and observes the villain as a whole. This is the second time he's met Kurogiri, technically, so it's weird to see him so... relaxed. It's hard to believe that this is the same villain who'd swept Izuku and his classmates into a portal-void and deposited them all over the USJ to be killed.

Izuku's not sure when he lets his eyes drift shut.

He's not asleep, nor is he awake. It's that strange in-between state where you're completely conscious, but you're not quite *there*. He hears noises around him, but he's too tired to force his eyes open and focus his attention.

He hears voices, but still doesn't open his eyes.

He just wants to sleep. He's so tired, and he hurts, and he just wants to go home. Even if he wanted to open his eyes, he's not sure his body would cooperate.

He doesn't truly stir until some glides over his knuckles, resulting in him jolting up as he forces his eyes open and up onto the figure peering down at him.

"Oh good!" A feminine voice chirps, and Izuku blinks tiredly up at a girl, "Deku's awake! Finally! I missed you so, so much while you were asleep!"

He's not sure he's ever met this girl. He doesn't even remember *seeing* her ever.

It takes Izuku a hazy second to realize that that *wasn't* a finger ghosting over his knuckles, but the blunt edge of a knife. The tip of the knife digs into his skin as the girl repositions it to drag up over his hand before pressing harder against his wrist where the makeshift splint starts.

The pressure increases, threatening to pierce through his skin.

He hardly manages to drag his eyes away from the tip of the knife on his skin, heart pounding as he stares up at her face. She's not looking at his face; lustful eyes watching intently everywhere the tip of her knife trails, "I wish I'd seen you while you were bleeding, Magne said you were the one to meet Muscular—I bet you would've been so pretty bleeding while fighting him."

"Don't cut him yet," a monotone voice warns from across the room, "you know Shigaraki will lose his fuckin' mind if you do anything to the kid without his blessing. I'm not sure any of us can handle another *tantrum*."

"Awh! But Dabi!" the girl whines, but the knife is slowly pulled away from his wrist. Izuku breaths a breath of relief when he notes there's no bleeding, despite the sting of metal pressing into his skin. "You're no fun! But I guess you're right. Shiggy doesn't want me to play with his new toy—no *fair*. I just know you would've looked so *good* bleeding, Deku."

The girl's bottom lip juts out as she finally steps away, skipping across the bar to plop down into one of the booths across from a villain wearing a black and grey costume with a mask covering his entire head.

Izuku surveys over the bar while he wills his heartrate to settle.

There are three new villains. Kurogiri is still behind the bar, now mixing a drink for a black-haired, stitched up man. Izuku assumes that one's Dabi, but he'd not entirely sure; that's the direction the monotone voice had come from.

Then there's the girl in the middle school uniform, and the man in the tight fitted costume.

Izuku wonders how many villains there are here. He's seen four now, but they've talked about more. Plus, there's the villain who'd trapped Tokoyami and Kacchan in those marbles, and he knows Shigaraki is also here.

"Keep your eyes to yourself, asshole! Don't gawp at us!" Izuku jerks his attention to where the man in the black costume is almost sneering in his direction. As fast as the sneer is there, it's gone fast enough to give Izuku whiplash. The sneer melts away as he cocks his head to the side and continues, voice faintly kinder. "He looks just like a cute lil' *puppy* checkin' us out!"

“You’re right, he does!” the girl chirps back with a nod, “he’s so cute!”

“Now, now,” Kurogiri’s tone is chiding. He slides the finished drink to Dabi, who picks it up and walks to join the two other villains at the booth. He doesn’t sit, just leans against the wall at the girl’s side. “Please calm yourselves. The others are still resting. We’re waiting until Shigaraki Tomura joins us. Please leave them alone for now.”

“He’s taking forever to get up,” the girl whines, slumping dramatically across the table.

“Yeah! That lazy bastard!” the masked one snarls, promptly followed by: “He deserves some rest!”

“Twice. Toga. Do you two idiots always talk about me when I’m not around?” Izuku’s gaze whips to the doorway where Shigaraki stands slumped. His tone is flared with annoyance, to which the two addressed don’t look the slightest bit bothered.

“Good evening, Shigaraki Tomura.”

“Kurogiri,” Shigaraki huffs in greeting before his gaze seems to zero in on Izuku. There’s a hand on his face, but Izuku can see a deranged smile spreading under it. “Well, well, looks like my prize is finally awake. I told you we’d be meeting again, Disciple. I just never *dreamed* it would be so soon.”

The villain leader steps threateningly towards him, and Izuku knows he should be looking at Shigaraki—of course he should, the man’s a *threat*—but he can’t help when his eyes drop to where someone small is peering out from behind his legs.

A child.

A little girl, no older than nine. Peering at him with dark brown, almost cat-like eyes. Her hair is black, pulled into pigtails, and she’s studying him with narrowed eyes. Izuku blinks owlishly at the little girl, and her brows furrow as she blinks back.

The League of Villains have a child with them.

What the hell?

Oboro hadn’t known where to go.

He’d hardly been able to think straight. He’d lost Izuku. He hadn’t

been fast enough. He was a weightless, massless, intangible being, and he still hadn't been fast enough. He'd still let Izuku slip through his fingers. He'd let the boy be stolen away by those villains. By *Shigaraki*.

For a while, after the portal is gone from existence, no trace left behind, Oboro can't even manage to pull himself to his feet. He sits there, knees dirtied, and hands unmoving where they'd dropped to the ground to catch himself when he'd *missed* the portal.

Around him, the students had cried, and screamed for Izuku. For Bakugou. They'd shouted their names, and cried for them. Screamed in defeat, before ultimately falling silent.

Oboro can't say he was much better.

Guilt blanketed over them as a whole; the students, Oboro, all of Izuku's *friends*—because they hadn't stopped this. They'd all been so close, and yet the villains had been able to grab not just Bakugou, but Izuku as well.

None of them had stopped it.

They couldn't.

And now he was gone.

Oboro stays far longer than any of Izuku's classmates.

At some point, the group leaves, defeated and dragging their feet. There's no doubt in Oboro's mind that there's a search taking place. Shota knows about the attack, and he'll be the first to start rounding everyone up. Oboro hopes for his school friend's sake, that the rest of the students are alright.

Oboro just stares at the place where Izuku had disappeared without a trace. The place where, for a few moments, a portal had resided. Now there's nothing.

He loses track of time for a while, when he finally pulls himself to his feet. He wanders in the general direction of the lodge, but has no motivation to actually return. He feels lost. He feels lonely.

It's been months since Oboro has felt like this.

He hasn't felt like this since that first day of school, where he'd first met a skittish Izuku. Where someone had *seen* him after thirteen years

of isolation.

When he does finally get back to the lodge, things are in full swing. Ambulances, police cars, fire trucks, and search and rescue vehicles. Students are being ushered along to the waiting busses and ambulances are whirring away, sirens blaring.

He finds Shota in the center of the mess, eyes blank as he leads 1-A, or those remaining, onto the bus they'd arrived in. Oboro wonders if Shota knows yet— about Izuku— and decides that, *yeah, he definitely does*. That blank look, those horror filled eyes, the forced neutral expression and the clenched jaw answers that question.

Shota is not alright.

Not in the slightest—this is hurting him more than anyone can see, but he's still putting on a mask for his students, and peers. Oboro wonders absently how long it'll take for Shota to finally *break*.

Probably when he sees Hizashi.

He sticks around Shota for a while, follows him from room to room as he checks on the students admitted into the hospital with minor injuries.

Thankfully no one was overly hurt.

Except Izuku, where ever he is.

That's the reason why Oboro can't bring himself to stay, even if the thought of leaving one of his closest friends at a time like this makes his stomach clench. Being in the hospital makes him feel physically sick. Izuku should be here. Izuku should be getting help, and he's *not*.

He'd gotten hurt—so *hurt*. Broken arms, and a bruised eye, not to mention the injuries not visible. He should be in a hospital, but instead, he'd been taken. Now he's been kidnapped, and he's injured, and it's... it's all Oboro's fault.

Oboro clenches a hand into a fist, as the other lifts to grip at his hair.

Hizashi had been his next stop when he can't bear the thought of the hospital any longer.

The blonde had been blissfully unaware of the storm brewing, and for a little bit, Oboro could *pretend* all was fine in the world. He tucked

himself in the corner of Shota and Hizashi's bathroom while the blonde gelled up his hair and got ready for the day.

Hizashi hums to himself, some English song he's been obsessed with for the last little while.

If he shuts his eyes, Oboro can almost imagine Izuku is just tucked away in his bedroom sleeping, and Shota is passed out on the bed still and—

Hizashi's phone rings, and Oboro's heart drops to his stomach.

He doesn't stick around to watch Hizashi's smile turn into a grimace as the information sinks in. He doesn't stick around to watch his friend brush away tears as he consoles Shota on the other end. And he definitely doesn't stick around as Hizashi collapses at the table and *sobs* after he ends the call with a promise to be *right there*.

There aren't a lot of places Oboro can go. None he feels welcome. He thinks about sitting in Izuku's room, he knows it's safe, but he squashes that thought down before it even really blooms. Sitting in Izuku's room without Izuku just sounds like pure torture.

He thinks about finding Nemuri and latching onto her for a while, until he can calm himself down and force himself back to the hospital. She should be awake now too, classes will still be in session for the rest of the school, Nezu will want to keep normalcy for as long as he possibly can before the news breaks out.

The thought of going to find Tensei is brushed off as fast as it appears. He knows Tensei is still hospital bound, recovering from near death and re-learning how to live his life without the use of his legs. Oboro knows he can't be in a hospital. Not right now.

He's not sure why he decides on Hitoshi in the end.

Maybe because the kid knows he exists—well, kinda. He's spoken to Hitoshi, even if it was only through a gaming console. It's still better than nothing. He just knows Hitoshi *knows* about him, and he doesn't want to, *can't*, be alone.

By the time he makes his way into the Shinsou apartment, beelining past Yua, who's stood at the stove stirring something, Hitoshi is already awake and getting ready for the day.

Oboro waits patiently outside the bathroom door, then follows the

teenager into the kitchen.

“Morning, Mom,” Hitoshi greets as he sits at the table.

“Morning, Kiddo,” Yua greets slowly, thoughtfully. Hitoshi’s brow furrows at her tone, clearly picking up on the stiffness. “Hey… ‘tosh, listen. You… ah, you remember how your uncle and Izuku were going to that training camp this week?”

“The bootcamp?” Hitoshi cocks an eyebrow, leaning on his fist, “yeah, I remember. Uncle Sho goes every year, and ‘zuku was stoked to go this year. I wish I could’ve gone too.”

“Don’t say that,” Oboro croaks out roughly as he drags his palms down his face in a dry-wash sort of way. He goes unheard, not that he expected anything else. Oboro can hardly bear the thought of possibly losing a *third* kid—the two he cares about most.

Yua’s face pinches in that protective, motherly way. Oboro sees the genuine relief that Hitoshi *wasn’t* there cross over her face for a second before that solemn look of poorly hidden desolation is back.

It’s hard to be thankful your kid is safe, when other kids aren’t.

One of them being your new nephew.

The woman sucks in a slow breath as she turns off the stovetop. She rounds the table and sits across from Hitoshi, reaching a hand out to settle over the teenager’s which is laying limply on the table top.

Hitoshi looks skeptically down at where she’s holding his hand, but Yua just frowns as she catches the boy’s eyes and continues softly, “there was an attack on the lodge last night—I just got off the phone with Hizashi.”

“An attack—” Hitoshi chokes on nothing, back ramrod as he stares disbelieving at his mother, “are… is uncle Sho okay? Is Izuku? What *happened*?”

“Your uncle is fine,” she shakes her head as she squeezes at Hitoshi’s hand, “but Izuku… I’m so sorry, sweetheart, but he was taken by the villains.”

Oboro’s back hits the wall as those words leave her mouth, the exhaustion coming out of nowhere. He shouldn’t even be affected; he knew exactly where this conversation was going the moment she

mentioned the bootcamp. It’s not a surprise, but it still knocks the air out of his lungs.

It’s not even a second later when his legs give out, and he sinks to the floor, face falling into his hands. The sound of static consumes his thoughts, and he's not even sure what's going on around him, but he can't be bothered to try and bring himself back.

What the hell is he gonna *do*?

Chapter End Notes

Sorry the perspective changed so much! I wanted to show a little bit of everyone since there's so much emotion going on! This chapter was fun to write, but also very depressing. Probably won't get better for the next couple, but I have something happy planned for after this arc!

So, thoughts on Kurogiri? I wasn't sure what to do with him at first, but I feel like he's just an all around caretaker? I was going for emotionless, but caring. Also blindly loyal to Shiggy because that's what he was made to be.

I'd also like to apologize now for upcoming chapters, where the League is involved, because I'm terrible at writing more then like four people in a scene. I always forget people, or ignore them accidentally, and the League is just such a big group. Also, this is the first I've written any of them, so I hope they aren't to OOC!

Anyways, as always! Lemme know what you thought! I adore all the comments you guys leave! It's the highlight of my day usually! Kudos are also amazing to see, and I can't believe we're over 7k kudos! That's the most on anything I've ever written, so thank you all for the support! <3

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! Welcome back to another update!

So, as I'm sure some of you guessed from the last chapter (I'm so glad so many of you guessed the ghost correctly!) I'll be talking about things now that in canon wouldn't be talked about until later seasons. If you haven't finished up to season 5 of the anime, there are spoilers! I've tagged the '*Anime Spoilers*' tag, but I thought I'd just warn everyone here!

Now, onto the update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku's train of thoughts crashes into a wall and derails completely as he stares wide-eyed at the little girl peeking out from behind Shigaraki.

He opens his mouth to speak, but he doesn't think any sound comes out. For a moment, nothing moves—well except the little girl who finally weaves out from behind Shigaraki and moves to stand in front of him, little arms crossed over her chest and eyes narrowed on him like *he's* the threat here.

Izuku's sure his jaw is agape as he stares down, mouth hanging wide open in surprise. His eyes don't leave the little girl, because the thought that there's a child here, in a villain's hideout—*with villains*—makes him feel sick. He'd known Shigaraki was bad, sure, but having a child here? A little kid no older than ten? That's sickening.

"You have a child here?" Izuku finally manages to snarl out, gaze finally lifting from the little girl and up to Shigaraki, who looks faintly surprised. The villain's face twists behind the hand he's wearing, as he looks around the room briefly before his focus is back on Izuku.

Shigaraki then reaches up and grabs the hand from his face with just four fingers before he's pulling it off slowly and letting his hand drop to his side. Izuku stares angrily at the League of Villain leader, glaring into Shigaraki's now revealed eyes

To his credit, the villain looks taken aback slightly, almost confused under the general annoyance. "What the hell're you talking about,

Disciple?”

If Izuku had working arms, and wasn’t tied up to Kacchan’s chair, he would’ve gestured sarcastically to the child stood literally in front of the villain. “The kid!” Izuku snaps instead, chin nodding downwards to the little girl who raises an eyebrow, “that kid! Why do you have a kid here?!”

“Uh,” Izuku hears from the side, and his narrowed eyes dart to the dark-haired villain, Dabi, “who the fuck are you talking about?”

“The girl!” Izuku fumes loudly, eyes shifting back to the child watching him. Her eyes have slivered as she studies him, and she doesn’t look afraid or anything. She almost looks humored, little brown eyes studying his expression as she rocks on the balls of her feet. “You guys have a little girl here!”

“Toga?” Kurogiri’s glaring yellow eyes crinkle with interest. “I’d hardly say she’s a little girl, Midoriya Izuku.”

“Me?” the girl in question squawks as if the deduction is absolutely absurd, “you meant *me*? That’s so rude! I am so not a little girl! I bet I’m even older than you are, Izuku!”

Izuku blinks slowly in the direction that the rest of the villains are sitting; Toga looking genuinely annoyed as Dabi’s lips tick upwards in amusement.

He angles his head, taking the girl in more than he had during his abrupt, vaguely threatening wake-up call. She actually does sorta look young, not much older than him he’d have to guess. The middle school uniform throws him for a bit of a loop, but he does believe she’s older than him.

But, she’s not who he’s talking about.

There’s a pause as Izuku makes no move to explain himself or his words, and no one else seems to want to broach the subject either. The pause is short lived as Toga huffs out an annoyed breath, tugging at the hem of her sweater and glaring down at it, “does this thing really make me look that young?!”

Dabi eyes her easily before shrugging, “yeah.”

“Of course not, you look like a mature young woman!” the man in the tight fit rubbery suit, Twice, Izuku thinks, yells in annoyance,

followed quickly by a lighter and fonder, “it makes you look like a cute little school girl!”

“It *is* a middle school kimono you’re wearing,” Kurogiri chimes in from behind the bar. “You are the only underaged individual here— not to mention the only female. With the exception of Magne of course, but she’s still resting, so it is unlikely Midoriya Izuku is talking about her.”

“Will you all knock it off!” Shigaraki snaps as he glares around the room at the group of villains. None look shamed at all, including Kurogiri, who Izuku had thought worshipped the ground Shigaraki walked on by the way he spoke about him. “Let me think! You’re all so annoying, I’m trying to talk!”

Despite not looking sheepish in the slightest, the entirety of the bar does quiet down.

Shigaraki has some power over his League at least.

The decay-villain takes another threatening step towards Izuku, arching down as he scratches at his neck so they’re face to face, “what the hell’re you playing at here, *Hero*? There are no kids here. None but you and that human explosive beside you.”

The villain sneers the word ‘Hero’ like it leaves a foul taste in his mouth and Izuku can just barely stop himself from flinching back in a wince as he’s helplessly forced nose to nose with one of the scariest villains he’d personally ever met.

Izuku wrinkles his nose, gearing up to continue to insist— he’s literally *looking* at a small child— and to demand answers, when a tiny but steady voice cuts him off, “he’s right.”

He turns slightly to see that the child had stepped up beside Shigaraki with an unwavering confidence. She’s so small beside Shigaraki, and doesn’t look scared at all. Does she even know who she’s standing beside? What Shigaraki can *do*? Does she not realize the danger?

He regards her carefully, and she does the same back before sighing, “how’re you even able to see me?”

And that’s when it all *clicks*.

Izuku sucks in a breath and leans away from Shigaraki as much as he can to really look at the child. She’s young, that much he’d noticed

before, but now, now that he really looks, he can see the faint translucence to her small frame. It's really hardly noticeable, even as she takes small steps towards him.

He always misses that tiny detail unless he's specifically looking for it —which is not something he does. Ghosts are usually few and far between, and he knows he'd look far crazier checking every single person he comes into contact with to see if they're a ghost, then he does occasionally getting confused and talking to a spirit around living people.

Still, it's a lot to wrap his head around, especially in this instance. As he looks over at this small, elementary-aged child who's stood in front of him, surrounded by villains in a *bar*.

A ghost.

This little girl is a ghost.

She's the youngest ghost he's ever met, not that he doesn't believe there are younger ones out there somewhere. She's just one of the youngest he's personally seen. A kid... a *dead* kid. This little girl had already died, and Izuku's heart seizes in his chest at the fact.

She's so *young*.

"You're..." Izuku cuts himself off by biting sharply at his own tongue. He jerks his attention from the child and back to Shigaraki who's looking at him like he's some complex puzzle. Or maybe like he's psychotic, which is incredibly offensive because has Shigaraki ever *looked in a mirror*? "O-oh."

"So you can see me, and hear me, but couldn't tell I'm dead?" the little girl crosses her arms over her chest, bottom lip poked out in a pout. "What are you?"

"What do you mean 'oh'?" Shigaraki snaps as he pushes even closer into Izuku's space. He's only an inch or so off from the tips of their noses touching, and Izuku feels crowded and afraid. "Answer my question, Disciple, who the hell were you talking about?"

"I—" Izuki tries to swallow down his fear. His heart thrums with panic, and the only thing in his mind is '*ooh I fucked up*'. "I m-made a mistake, you're all blurry to me, I, ah, I mean, I can hardly *see* out of one eye, so when, um, T-Toga, I believe that's her name, was beside me, I couldn't really... um... m-my mistake..."

The little ghost beside him snorts a laugh, hiding a smile behind her hand.

Izuku really wants to shoot a scowl in the child's direction, but that's too risky right now. Instead, the teen swallows heavily, praying to whatever deity exists that Shigaraki will buy it. Last thing he needs now is to out himself to the League of Villains when his guardians and teachers don't even know.

And it's not technically an excuse either. Not completely, at least.

He really is impaired in one eye—it's so swollen he can hardly see out of it. The Advil didn't help much with the swelling. His vision is blurry, and only having one working eye when he's used to two distorts what he can see. It'll take some getting used to.

"He is quite swollen, Shigaraki Tomura," Kurogiri hums out from behind the bar. Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku sees the little girl frown heavily, eyes narrowed on the void-villain. "I imagine his vision is impaired due to injury."

"And Toga's walking around looking like a prepubescent teen," Dabi adds drily. "Can't blame the kid for calling us out when she looks like we stole her from her walk home from junior high. He's a *Hero class* kid after all."

"Hey!" Toga huffs out in annoyance, contorting in her seat to kick the dark-haired man. "You're so mean, Dabi! I *don't* look that young! And I'm here on my own free will, Izuku!"

"Whatever," Shigaraki snaps, prompting a hush to fall over the villains in the bar, "will you all just shut up! Enough bickering!"

There's a pause as Shigaraki glares around at his subordinates before his irritated gaze is flicking back to Izuku where it hardens, "listen here, Midoriya Izuku. Don't ever *accuse* me of anything like that again. Got it? You won't find any *children* here. Kids are annoying, vile little creatures that *cry* and *whine* and I refuse to have them around."

Izuku manages a nervous nod, hoping it doesn't come off as nervous. It takes everything in him not to chance a glance at the little girl, but he somehow manages. It's hard not to feel afraid when Shigaraki's hand stretches out towards him like he's about to decay him before stopping and pulling back after what appears to be a short internal battle.

The little girl makes a sort of 'humh' sound as Shigaraki pulls back, like she's been waiting for Izuku's attention to speak. She glares heatedly at an unknowing Shigaraki, before glancing at Izuku to make sure she has his focus before narrowing her gaze back on the League of Villains leader. "It's funny that *you're* speaking of annoying, whiny little things."

Izuku almost chokes on his own breath as he desperately caps the surprise rising in his lungs.

He knows, logically, that this is a ghost talking to the villain— a ghost who *won't* be heard— but anyone who's brave enough to say something like that, about someone like Shigaraki, is to be feared. Ghost or not.

Izuku lets his eyes flick back to where the child is stood, not letting his gaze linger in fear of being called out or discovered. She looks smug, almost proud of the retort, even if Shigaraki can't hear her. Doesn't even know someone had said something.

The only thing Izuku knows for certain, is the fact he's incredibly glad for her sake that he's the only one who can hear her, he's sure Shigaraki wouldn't be too pleased to hear something like that come from a child.

Izuku bites his bottom lip as he watches halfheartedly as the child cross the room and pull herself into a barstool. He can't help but wonder why this little girl is here. What's keeping her here, and who does she know?

He knows Oboro trails after his high school friends, and a lot of other ghosts he comes into contact with follow loved ones, but he just can't imagine who this little girl is tailing. Which member of the League of Villains had a kid, let alone a kid that *died*.

He has questions, but he refuses to ask when there are witnesses around. He doesn't know what Shigaraki would do with him if he realized Izuku could see the dead—could use someone who's deceased's Quirk. Or, well, they could use his Quirk to use their own Quirk... There's no point getting into the mechanics of it right now, the point was it would be dangerous for Shigaraki to figure it out.

Izuku forces his attention back onto the villains. It's then he realizes that Shigaraki is waiting for an actual response. Eyes narrowed intensely and a scowl curling his features. He's closer than he had been before, and Izuku wonders if the villain has ever heard of

personal space, or if he just doesn't care.

Izuku swallows again, "I won't."

An apology sits on the tip of his tongue, but he refuses to say it. He will not apologize to his captors. Shigaraki does not deserve an apology when Izuku and Katsuki are tied down and being held hostage.

"Good," the man snaps, "I may be interested in you, Disciple, but that doesn't mean I won't kill you if it turns out that you're more work than you're worth. Sensei and I don't need you; we need *him*." Shigaraki's chin jerks towards a still unconscious Katsuki, and protectiveness swirls in Izuku's stomach.

"What do you need him for?"

"Wouldn't you like to know. Worried about your little classmate?" Shigaraki snarls in annoyance. "Y'know, you're not in any position to be demanding answers from me, Midoriya Izuku. This is my game, and you're just a player. I'm the main character here, and you're nothing but my reward for the completion of a hard level."

Izuku ducks his head in a nod, not wanting to irritate the one in control any more than he already has. There's so much he wants to ask. So many questions. But he also knows Shigaraki isn't completely sane, and he can't risk pushing too much.

Shigaraki finally pulls back, squeezing the hand in his hand as he digs his other hand in his pocket, "I've been thinking a lot since I met you, Disciple. First you punch my Nomu—nearly indestructible. Built to hold its own against All Might himself and yet you managed to make it stagger... That in and of itself is curious. A Quirk so powerful it can stand against a Nomu. Strength on par with that of the Number One Hero..."

Shigaraki glares, "then those stupid clouds appeared. In the attack at the USJ, and again during the Sports Festival. Twice I saw those irritating clouds. In person and on screen. Getting in the way, and ruining my plans. Fucking up the Sports Festival. I hate intermissions. Making me *wait*."

Izuku feels his mouth dry at the mention of the clouds. Of Oboro. Oh no. Maybe Shigaraki is more observant than Izuku gave him credit for if he's connecting the USJ to the Sports Festival. Both places Oboro managed to use his Quirk.

The villain doesn't seem to notice the dread painting Izuku's face, he just keeps speaking.

"Something at the USJ kept me trapped in those *annoying* clouds. Something kept Kurogiri from locating me, and something kept my Nomu from finishing the job and ending both you and Eraserhead... and that same something made an appearance at the Sports Festival too. Weeks later."

Shigaraki is quiet, glaring across the room before looking back at Izuku sharply, "would you care to take a guess of *what* just so happened to show up along with the clouds at both places, both times that *phenomenon* occurred, Midoriya?"

Izuku swallows, keeping his eyes on the villain but making no move to nod or shake his head despite having a pretty good idea where this was going. He can't deny or confirm. He *can't*. If Shigaraki has been piecing this all together, he'll only be digging his own grave if he offers any confirmation.

"No?" Shigaraki drawls, "it was *you*, Disciple. Both times. My Nomu's about to kill you and suddenly we can't see. You and those other *Heroics students* are gone, and we can't find Eraserhead anywhere to finish him off. Then it's just you and that purple-haired brainwashing kid fighting during the festival, and suddenly the arena is filled with clouds. Those can't be coincidences!"

Shigaraki cards four fingers through his hair, taking great care to keep the fifth finger raised as he shouts. No longer than a second later, the villain is slowly turning back towards Izuku, "you know, if I didn't know any better, I'd think you have *two Quirks*."

Izuku feels like he's been punched in the stomach. His heart is in his throat, and his ears are ringing. No, no, no—Shigaraki can *not* know. No one can. But Shigaraki knowing? That's the worst possible thing to happen. Izuku is screwed. He is so *screwed*—

"But then you didn't help yourself at the mall when we were chatting."

The villain growls lowly, and Izuku's attention jerks up to him in surprise, "I was waiting for those clouds. You were the connecting factor both times, you were *there* both times; center of attention. You had to have had a connection to them! Those clouds saved your ass—but at the mall, they didn't. I could've killed you, and you still didn't help yourself."

Shigaraki's voice wavers, like he's bouncing between talking to Izuku and talking to himself.

"I thought they were connected to you, but if you could use them at will—if they *were* a second Quirk— you would've saved your own skin and tried to be *heroic* and apprehend me at the mall that day."

Shigaraki glares hard at Izuku, almost daring him to defend himself, "and you would've used it by *now* as well. A hero protects his friends, right? But I don't see you trying to rescue poor unconscious Bakugou Katsuki; the one who was my target and is the one I need. You ran forward to save him, right? So save him."

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but he can't even begin to think of a reply. His jaw snaps shut quietly and he just stares wide-eyed at Shigaraki. Shigaraki's patience seems to be running thin, because soon after he stops talking, he's turning away with a snarl.

"I was *wrong*." Shigaraki scratches at his neck, lip twitching in a scowl, "I *hate* being wrong."

It's almost funny that Shigaraki came to the correct conclusion, but talked himself out of it. Izuku is incredibly thankful he and Oboro didn't use their Quirks at the mall, even though he knows the ghost still blames himself for not stepping in and trying to help.

If Oboro had of tried to help, if any clouds appeared that day, Izuku's sure Shigaraki wouldn't have talked himself out of the thought. They very well may have been having a totally different conversation right now if that was the case.

"How do you do it?" Shigaraki stalks towards him, "who do you have working with you?"

"N-no one," Izuku whispers hoarsely, "I don't... having two Quirks is very rare—" unless you're All for One, or you possess One for All. "I just have an emitter Quirk. Strength; you saw it—I mean, I punched the Nomu, right?"

Shigaraki glares down at him over his nose, before looking up and regarding the watching villains sitting around the bar. "Strength like All Might."

"I'm nowhere near as strong as All Might," Izuku defends desperately, "All Might managed to punch the Nomu through the ceiling of the USJ, I hardly made it move."

“That heroic piece of garbage,” Shigaraki snaps, eyes narrowed with rage, “launching a perfectly good Nomu away! I bet the police have it now, I hate him.”

“Calm down, Shigaraki Tomura,” Kurogiri chides softly from the bar. “There are other Nomu for your use.”

“I liked that one,” Shigaraki snarls, whipping around to glare at the bartender.

“Here we go,” Dabi scoffs as he sips his drink.

“Shut up!” Shigaraki hisses in Dabi’s direction, “I’m don’t have time to waste my efforts talking to that useless hero kid. Someone get me when the explosive one’s up. For now, Kurogiri, let’s go. Sensei wants to see us.”

“Yes, Shigaraki Tomura.”

Hitoshi isn’t sure what to think when he finds out the news that his uncle and pseudo-cousin had been attacked, and that Izuku was now *missing*. He loses a bit of time in between his mother settling her hand on his and explaining what she knew about Izuku’s kidnapping and the attack on the bootcamp, talking in that soft-spoken voice she only ever uses on him and uncle Sho, and the time when she finally leaves for work.

Honestly, it takes more insisting on his part, telling her that *he’s fine*, than he’d care to admit for her to finally relent and slip out the door, leaving him alone so she could make it to work on time.

Frankly, Hitoshi was a little annoyed—just because Izuku was missing, and his uncles are undoubtedly a *mess*, doesn’t mean Hitoshi needs a babysitter.

Was a bit of time alone to think too much to ask for?

He doesn’t know what he would’ve done if his mother hadn’t listened to him. If she’d insisted and ignored what he was saying. She has a tendency to be a bit over protective, and it makes sense considering her little brother is a Hero, and that Hitoshi himself is aiming for the same thing, but it’s still suffocating at times like this.

Now though, Hitoshi isn’t sure what to think as he sits alone at the table, surrounded by bowls of cold rice and miso soup. He’s already

late for school, or he would be if his mother hadn't *insisted* he didn't need to go.

"You don't have to force yourself, sweetheart," she'd said quietly, squeezing at his hand, "I know this is a lot, and I'm sure none of your teachers or classmates would blame you for taking some time to process this. Izuku is essentially your cousin— he is your *friend*. You're allowed to not be okay."

"I'm fine," Hitoshi had replied, voice teetering between snapping and quiet. "I shouldn't miss school, I need to get into Heroics, Mom. I should be there. This has nothing to even do with me. I-I doubt the rest of the school is even *aware*—"

"Take one day, Hitoshi," and her tone had shifted a bit to a more demanding tone, "Izuku is missing. I know you're hellbent on being the very best and making it into your uncle's class, but I know you best, Kiddo, and I know you're *not* okay. Just... please. For me, Hitoshi, take a day to think. Take a day to process this."

He'd known then that she wouldn't insist he stay home if he insisted that he should still go himself. Her tone hadn't been finality, it had been pleading demanding. That '*I know you're not fine, and I'm giving you an out*' sorta tone.

And so he had. He'd relented, and he's not sure if that had been for his own sake, or for hers in the end. He'd ducked his head in a tiny nod, and pressed his chin against his sternum when his mother had smiled softly and pressed a thankful kiss to the top of his head.

It had taken even more work to convince his mother that she should go to work.

"'m fine," Hitoshi sighed, trying not to slam his head on the table in defeat. "You don't need to stay home with me. You need to go to work. You're busy—you've been talking for weeks about this meeting you have scheduled. I don't need a babysitter."

"It's not babysitting, Hitoshi," his mother groans like she's talking to a child (case and point, honestly), "it's a mother being worried about her son. I don't think you should be alone."

"And I don't think I need a babysitter," the teen fires back, "I really am fine. I already agreed to not go to school—and it's not like this is the first time I've stayed home alone. I'm fifteen, mom, almost *sixteen*. I *don't* need a babysitter."

“Your friend went missing,” his mom reminds softly, “this is stressful, and scary, and I know for a fact your uncles are scared too. And for good reason. Two students were taken from a school outing, after the entire camp was attacked. You’re allowed to need someone, Hitoshi. You’re allowed to be scared.”

“I’m fine.”

He doesn’t have the heart to tell her that even if he *did* need someone —or if he didn’t want to be alone, it wouldn’t be his mother, or even father, that he’d be looking for. He loves them, of course, and at times his mother’s comfort is the only thing he’s looking for, but not now. Not for this.

If he did think he needed someone, which he *doesn’t*, he’d want to be with his uncles—they're the ones who’d need him back. They’re the ones he’s looking for; the ones who understand this. The ones who feel what he’s feeling, and know what he’s talking about. It’s personal for them, just as it is for him.

Izuku is *missing*.

His parents know of Izuku, sure, his mom had met the green-haired teen exactly once when she stopped by Shota and Hizashi’s apartment to pick him up a couple days before the bootcamp, and his dad hadn’t yet met the other teen, but that didn’t mean they *knew* Izuku.

That didn’t mean they understood the bottomless pit feeling in Hitoshi’s stomach, that he can only imagine is *worse* for his uncles. It didn’t mean they understood the anxiety that his friend was missing, the sick feeling that he was captured by the villains, who’re wild-cards at best.

Just because they knew of Izuku, didn’t mean they knew Izuku’s sunshine-y personality, or his frankly scary intelligence. How Izuku was so kind to everyone, including Hitoshi, who’d been nothing but an asshole to him in that period between the Sports Festival and finding out they were both in relation to Shota in one way or another.

They didn’t know Izuku, and maybe they’re scared and worried by relation, but they don’t miss *him*.

"Really,” Hitoshi whispers out, defeat creeping into his voice, “I’m fine alone. I’ll be fine. I’d... I’d actually like to be alone for a while. I just... I need some time to think. I won’t go to school, but please don’t hover over me.”

When he looked up, his mother's expression had softened. "You really want to stay home alone? I'm serious, Hitoshi, I don't mind staying home with you. You're more important than my meeting. And even if you did insist I go to that meeting, I'm sure dad wouldn't mind coming home to be with you."

"I just want to think." Hitoshi pauses before adding, "alone."

His mother is quiet for a second before she lets out a sigh, "alright."

"What?"

"Alright." She repeats, though doesn't look completely sold on the idea, "I'll go to work, but listen to me. If you need me, call and I'll come right home, okay? I trust you, and I know you don't need a babysitter, but please be smart about this. Call me, or your dad, or even your uncles if you need us, okay?"

"Okay."

His mother studies his face, eyes sweeping over his features as she looks for and dishonesty or fear. He doesn't think she finds anything, because a moment later she's sighing again and lifting a hand to ruffle her fingers through his unkept purple hair before leaning down to press a light kiss against his forehead.

"I have to get going," she mumbles as she pulls away, "promise me you'll call someone if you need to. Or if you plan on going anywhere. I know you like to walk to clear your head, but with kids missing and villains running loose, you need to let someone know where you are."

"I will," Hitoshi huffs. "Promise."

"Good," his mother hums out as she studies him one last time before disappearing into the other room to gather up her stuff and put her shoes on, "I love you, Hitoshi. Be good."

"Love you," Hitoshi replies honestly, as he digs his chopsticks in his rice, "have a good day at work."

His mother leaves after that, and he's left alone with his thoughts. He doesn't know how long he actually sits at the table, but by the time he remembers he was supposed to be finishing his breakfast, the top layer of his rice has hardened and the miso soup is cold to the touch.

He's still not hungry, so he pushes the bowls back and flops down on

the table top.

His thoughts won't settle, but at the same time, he's not really thinking anything. He just can't seem to wrap his head around the fact that Izuku is gone. That someone had taken him.

He almost pities the poor idiot who'd take Izuku—not only are Shota and Hizashi going to tear the world apart in order to find him, but Hitoshi also knows that All Might has a rather soft spot for Izuku too. Plus, there's all the Pro Hero friends his uncles have—Auntie Nem, and Nezu, and Vlad King, and pretty much all the Yuuei teachers, and not to mention the whole network of underground Heroes who'll help.

He knows Izuku will be located some way or another, but he feels useless sitting here. He wants to be a Hero, yet all he's doing is sitting at his dining table. He should be helping. He should be looking for Izuku.

He should be—

Wait.

Wait a second...

"Ro," Hitoshi gasps out, jolting up in his seat. Ro. There's a ghost who could possibly know where Izuku is. Ro might know. Why is he just thinking of this now? IZuku has been gone since last night—surely Ro must know something. Even if he only knows more details, the kind of details that Hizashi wouldn't tell his mother, let alone tell her over the phone.

The ghost must know something, right?

Hitoshi is standing before he even knows what he's doing. He moves swiftly to the drawer in the genkan where his parents keep all the keys, including the spare key to his uncle's apartment. There are a couple different key rings dropped thoughtlessly in drawer, but it doesn't take long to find the one he's looking for.

With the key in hand, Hitoshi tugs on a sweatshirt and slips into his shoes. He leaves the house quickly making sure he has his wallet and student transportation pass.

It's not until he's on the bus heading towards the apartment does he think to text Hizashi and warn him that he's coming over, even if Hizashi probably isn't there. He barely entertains the thought of

texting uncle Sho— if he thinks Hizashi is stressed, then uncle Sho must be near catatonic at this point.

He doesn't want to bother him at all.

Truthfully, he doesn't want to bother either of them, but he also doesn't want to just show up at their apartment and let himself in. Last thing he needs is for one of them to come home randomly and think he's an intruder, especially after their kid has just been kidnapped.

And, he'd be pretty dead if his mom or dad went home and he wasn't there. He knows the first thing either of them will do is text the other, followed by texting his uncles. He has half a mind to text his parents, but knows that'll raise more questions he doesn't want to answer.

And he could not deal with someone hovering over his shoulder right now.

Hitoshi 10:43 AM

Hey, are you home?

It takes a little while for a response. He must be busy; either with uncle Sho, or tending to the other students who'd been in the attack, or even talking with the police.

His uncles are never ones to ignore texts.

He doubts they've left the hospital; he knows how protective of all his students Uncle Sho tends to get, and as much as he likes to groan about this year's 1-A, Hitoshi knows better than anyone that Shota already has a soft spot for them.

Hizashi 10:51 AM

No.

We're at the hospital with Tsukauchi.

Sorry, Tosh

Why?

Are you okay?

Hitoshi 10:52 AM

I'm fine.

I left a book in Izuku's room and I was wondering if I could grab it.

The next response comes faster. Hitoshi can almost imagine the confusion on Hizashi's face. A cocked eyebrow as he reads the message and tries to make sense of it.

To be fair, it does sound like an odd request—or, maybe just an out of place request. Maybe it even sounds insensitive considering Izuku is missing, and Shota and Hizashi are probably worried out of their minds, and here Hitoshi is asking about a *book*.

If he weren't so intent on getting into that apartment, hanging onto a hope that a ghost he's barely met before might have answers to his friend's disappearance, he might've just brushed this whole conversation off and given up in embarrassment.

He doesn't feel like such a great nephew or cousin right now, but he's praying this will all work out. That Ro will be able to help Hitoshi is some way, and he wasn't an asshole for no reason. When this is all over, and Izuku's home, Hitoshi will make sure to apologize to Hizashi for the insensitive request and for bothering him like he is.

Hizashi 10:53 AM

A book?

Sho and I are pretty busy over here, Toshi. I don't think either of us can make it home anytime soon, do you really need it that bad?

Hitoshi 10:54 AM

I can use the spare key.

You don't have to come home I'll be super quick.

I know you guys are busy I just really need that book.

Hitoshi bites his bottom lip as he taps the side of his phone in thought.

He feels silly talking about grabbing a book, distracting his uncle when they should be focusing on finding Izuku and bringing him home. It's nothing more than a desperate excuse, and not even a very good one at that. But Hitoshi knows Izuku has a lot of books, and he

knows it'll be believable.

He just needs to get into the apartment.

Still, he doesn't know where Ro hangs out. He doesn't even really know if he'll find the ghost in the apartment. He knows Ro likes Izuku, so maybe the ghost is with him. Hitoshi's not sure whether that thought is comforting, or worrying.

He shakes his head and types out another text—one that'll hopefully plead his case.

Hitoshi 10:55 AM

Sorry.

I just borrowed the book from a neighbor and then lent it to Izuku by mistake and he wants it back now.

I know ur busy.

Hitoshi stares down at his phone screen as he waits for a reply. Hizashi doesn't reply fast, so Hitoshi thinks the man might be thinking it over, or maybe even talking to his uncle about it.

He doesn't think he'll be denied—it's not like he's dragging them away from something important to unlock the door for him, he just needs to get in there.

There's a chance that some answers to his questions might just be sitting idly in the apartment. Answers to Izuku's whereabouts. Any answers. He's *desperate*.

Hitoshi jolts from his thoughts when his phone vibrates in his hands at the replying message. The screen had blacked out due to inactivity, but a breath of relief rushes out of his lungs as he reads Hizashi's message on his lock screen.

Hizashi 10:59 AM

Just make sure you lock up, kay?

Hitoshi shoots off a quick thank you text before pocketing his phone and getting ready to hop off the bus as it slows to a stop a few blocks away from his uncle's apartment building.

When he gets off the bus, Hitoshi rushes up the stairs and pauses at

the apartment door. There's something eerie about being here when no one else is.

For the longest time, he'd been scared shitless of the ghost he claimed lived at his uncle's apartment. His uncles had always told him ghosts didn't exist—even though sometimes Hizashi looked just as spooked as Hitoshi.

He never could have even imagined himself coming here alone—let alone to actually contact the ghost he now knows exists. How the times have changed.

Hitoshi unlocks the door easily, pocketing the key so he doesn't lose it.

In the genkan is where Hitoshi finally pauses in uncertainty. Now that he's actually in the apartment, he doesn't really know how to continue. Does he just... call out? Will Ro do something? Izuku had always said the ghost uses his energy, so how will Ro be able to respond without Izuku here? What if the ghost isn't even here?

Hitoshi slips his shoes off and makes a beeline for Izuku room. He pushes down the tightening feeling in his stomach in favor of flipping the lights on and sitting on the edge of his friend's bed.

"...Ro?" Why does he feel like an idiot talking to nothing? "Are, uh, are you here?"

He waits for a while, glaring around the room like something will jump out at him. Like Ro the ghost will suddenly materialize and answer all his question. God, Hitoshi feels like an idiot.

"This is so stupid, he's probably not even—" the teen mutters to himself before he sharply cuts himself off, pausing where he'd been pushing himself up off the bed, ready to leave when the light overhead flickers. Hitoshi freezes, eases back down onto the mattress, "Ro?"

It flickers again, before shutting off completely.

Hitoshi just manages to keep his startled exclamations to himself, as the light turns back on after a long second. "The lights aren't just spasming, right, this is *really* Ro?"

It flickers again.

Hitoshi clicks his tongue, "okay, um, turn the light off for 'no' and

flicker it for ‘yes’?”

The light flickers briefly before it shuts off without warning. After a second the light is back on.

Hitoshi is quiet for a moment, and the light don’t do anything—not that he thought he was imagining anything or that the lights really were just malfunctioning or anything.

“Okay, um, you... you know what happened to Izuku, right?”

Instantly the light flicker overhead. Thank God, he does not want to have to explain that Izuku is missing to Izuku’s ghost friend. Though Ro probably would’ve figured it out by now anyways.

“Were you... um, were you there? Ah, w-with him when it... when it happened?”

Hitoshi winces as the light flickers twice, like the lights don’t want to admit to it but do anyways.

“Do you know where Izuku is?”

For the first time, the light doesn’t do anything instantly. For a moment, Hitoshi thinks that maybe Ro left at some point, and then he’s blanketed in darkness. *No*. He doesn’t know where Izuku is. Damnit.

Hitoshi reaches up to card his fingers through his hair stressfully, “damnit.”

The lights flicker, even though he didn’t ask anything. Ro seems to agree with the sentiment. Hitoshi knows Ro has a sense of humor from when they’d played games together, and he won’t lie and say it isn’t nice to see a bit of normalcy. Even if it’s from a ghost.

“So you were there, but you don’t know where Izuku is now?”

The light flickers and Hitoshi lets out a sigh. The light flickers a second time, agreeing once again with Hitoshi’s exhausted exhale. The boy manages a tired laugh at the thought.

“Do you think you can hold the game controller, or, or a pencil or something?”

There’s another pause before the light flicks off. Hitoshi had feared Ro wouldn’t have as much power without Izuku, and that’s clearly true.

It's a good think Ro's been playing around with lights since before Izuku met them. They have at least one means of conversation.

"Okay. That's fine. Um, so, can you tell me what happened?" Hitoshi asks, adding a quick "via yes and no answers, of course." as an afterthought.

The light flickers once again, and Hitoshi lets out another exhale that sounds suspiciously like a sigh before he gives the room a light smile, "this might take a while..."

A couple more hours have passed, Izuku thinks.

There're no clocks anywhere, and none of the villains have been kind enough to tell him the time when he asks. He hasn't seen Kurogiri since the man had trailed off after Shigaraki, but Izuku hopes he'll get to talk to him again. He'd been far kinder than the other villains here, and maybe he'd be nice enough to tell him the time again.

He knows it's been a couple hours at least by the now pulsing pain in his arms. It's returned full force and it aches bad enough it's starting to cloud his thoughts. The Advil has worn off and now he's left in agony.

Despite the hours passing as slow as molasses, there hasn't been a second where the two students have been left alone. There's always a steady stream of villains standing guard in the bar like they have shifts or something. That's what Izuku's noticed, at least. They don't want to really leave them alone without supervision.

It's probably smart to not leave two Heroic course students unattended, but it almost feels mocking when Izuku himself is in no shape to do anything, let alone escape, and Kacchan still hasn't roused. It's irritating. There's always someone watching.

And even when the villains aren't paying explicit attention, it still feels like someone is always watching. He always feels eyes on him, but it's worse here.

At this point, he thinks he's seen all the villains in the bar with their rounds.

He's not sure he can match names to faces just yet, but he knows there's eight of them all together. He thinks that if he keeps listening in, at some point he'll have all their names. It'll probably be useful to

the police. Maybe.

He knows that all these villains are probably going by aliases instead of their given names, so he doesn't really know if it'll be useful. Still, it's worth a shot, and there's nothing else he can be doing. It's killing him to just be sitting here idly, while the two of them are in danger.

The ghost child hasn't left the room once; has instead spent her time studying both Izuku and Kacchan. She doesn't say much, hardly even regards Izuku more than brief bouts of eye contact that she usually glances away from first.

The bar hasn't opened yet, so Izuku has no idea what time it really is. Not to mention the fact this bar could have odd hours if it's a bar that caters to villains and night life. Kurogiri had said it was around three when he'd asked him earlier, and he knows it feels like he's been a crumpled mess on the floor for at least five hours since waking.

He hasn't seen Shigaraki or Kurogiri since they'd left the room, supposedly to talk to Sensei. All for One. Izuku can just pray Shigaraki doesn't mention him at all. He's not a part of their plans after all, both Kurogiri and Shigaraki himself had told him as much.

That does mean he's a little more worried about what they have planned for Kacchan though. He is a part of their plans. What the hell could the villains want with Kacchan? Why Kacchan?

Izuku cocks his head up to look at Katsuki. It's concerning how long he's been asleep—Kacchan hadn't been injured or anything as far as Izuku had seen. Maybe the void travel did take more out of him than it did Izuku. Everyone was different.

Izuku lets his gaze shift from Kacchan and over to the villain watching them.

The man has a lizard mutation sort of Quirk, and Izuku faintly remembers seeing him when he'd found Mandalay. He'd said something about the Hero Killer: Stain, but Izuku can't remember what.

"What's your name?"

He knows his voice comes out soft, but it's all he can do to not rouse the sleeping lizard-mutated villain who's slumped in one of the booths. Izuku glances quickly over to make sure his tone had been adequate before looking at the little girl, still propped up at the bar.

“Me?” she asks with a raised eyebrow, and all Izuku can do is nod. “Hana.”

“Hana,” Izuku repeats softly, “that’s a pretty name.”

The child’s nose wrinkles like she doesn’t quite believe the honesty in his tone. She swirls around on the stool to face him, eyeing him for what feels like the thousandth time. Her gaze scans up him, and for a second, Izuku is reminded of how Nemo scans everyone who isn’t Shota when they get too close to her. He misses the cats.

“How *do* you see me?” the little girl inquires as she slips off the stool finally. She walks confidently across the bar, until she’s stood in front of Izuku, similarly to how Shigaraki had earlier though she at least has some personal space etiquette.

“I don’t know,” he answers honestly, and it’s true. He really doesn’t know. Never has, and probably never will know. It’s not like this is something you can just ask doctors about—even Quirk specialists. “I’ve always been able to see people like you. I’m just different, I guess.”

“You mean you see *dead* people?”

Izuku manages a little smile at the child-like bluntness, “yeah.”

“How come you couldn’t tell I was dead before?” She seems satisfied with his answer—satisfied enough to kneel down on the ground before him so they’re the same height. The strain of looking up off of his neck feels heavenly as he fixes his attention ahead of himself. “You thought I was *really* here.”

“You don’t look much different to me,” Izuku shrugs, which is a mistake as currents of pain shoot through his arms and into his chest. He wheezes out, eyes watering as he squeezes them shut.

“You’ll wake Spinner if you’re too loud,” Hana chides. “You don’t want to talk when people are listening. Is it because you’re crazy?”

“I’m not crazy,” Izuku mutters as he wills the pain to settle. When it does, he slivers his eyes open and looks back at Hana, who’s watching him in interest. “People are sometimes mean when you’re different. And you are really here, Hana, even if people can’t normally see you. You do exist.”

“Doesn’t count if no one can see me,” she huffs as her arms cross over

her chest. “Why’re people mean to you just because you see dead people? I think it’s cool.”

Izuku knows better than to shrug this time around, “I don’t know. I think people are afraid of the things they don’t understand. Sometimes we’re not very nice when we’re afraid. People don’t like things that are different.”

“Oh,” Hana is quiet for a second as she slips from her knees down to her butt. “Maybe that’s why people were so mean to my brother.”

Izuku gives a thoughtful hum, “is he different too?”

The little girl gives a slow nod, “he didn’t have a Quirk for a long time.”

And *oh*, isn’t that something? Someone else being treated differently because they didn’t have a Quirk. Different compared to normal, Quirk standards. “I’m sorry your brother was treated different for something he couldn’t change about himself.”

The girl gives another nod, thoughtful this time. “Our dad wasn’t very nice to him because he didn’t have one. I didn’t mind that he didn’t have a Quirk, and neither did momma, but dad really did.”

“I’m sorry,” Izuku says quietly because he doesn’t know what else to say.

“Why?” She furrows her brow, “it’s not *your* fault dad was mean sometimes.”

Izuku really isn’t in the mood to explain an empathetic apology to a child, a ghost child, so he just shakes his head with a tiny smile. The girl’s nose wrinkles as she eyes him before she huffs out a light breath, “I think you’re crazy.”

Izuku actually lets out a tiny laugh at that. A ghost calling him crazy for something other than seeing ghosts. Figures.

They lapse into silence. Izuku lets his eyes slip shut while Hana just pulls her knees up to her chest and rests her chin on top if the indent between them. It’s the ghost who breaks the silence, “how’d you get hurt?”

Izuku lets one eye fall open, “I was saving a little boy from a villain attack.”

The child nods, looking away. “Was it one of these villains?”

Izuku is quiet as he thinks it over. Normally, he wouldn’t hesitate to admit he was attacked by a bulking villain, there’s something about the way Hana asks—soft and cautious—that has Izuku hesitating. The child sounds... remorseful. Like she doesn’t approve of what’s going on behind closed doors.

And besides, Izuku doesn’t know who this child really is. Who she’s following, and the last thing he needs is to upset her by talking shit about a villain she may very well be related to.

He chooses not to answer, and instead asks a question of his own, “why do you stay here, Hana?”

“I follow my brother,” the girl tells him without hesitation. “I wasn’t... a very good big sister, and we all left him alone so now I don’t...” she glares down at the ground, “I don’t want him to be alone, even if he *thinks* he is. I wasn’t a very good sister then, but I can be one now.”

“Who’s your brother?” Izuku asks. She doesn’t quite look like any of the villains he’s seen. Perhaps under the masks she looks like Mr. Compress, or Twice, but he can’t be sure.

“Shimura Tenko,” she offers with a light smile. “He’s my little brother.”

“Tenko,” Izuku tastes the name, trying desperately to match a name to the face. He hasn’t heard that name before. He’s never even heard anyone mention that name. “Who is...”

“Oh,” the girl huffs blandly, “right, he doesn’t go by that name anymore. *Sensei* gave him a new one. I think *Shigaraki Tomura* is a stupid name. Tenko suits him so much better. I’ll always call him Tenko.”

Izuku feels his body tense as the information sinks in. Shigaraki... this child is Shigaraki’s older sister. Hana knows about Sensei? Hana knows All for One.

He doesn’t know what to think. What to feel. He has absolutely no idea how to process this.

This is weird.

This is far more personal than Izuku thought it would be when he first

saw the child.

This is Shigaraki's older sister.

What the hell??

Izuku's jolts up at the sound of the door opening. He wants to look away, but he's focused on where Hana is glaring slightly at the newcomer.

Spinner also jerks awake, wiping a trail of drool from his mouth as he glares heatedly at Kurogiri who's the one stood in the doorway.

"You're relieved of watch duty," the void-Quirked man offers easily flickering eyes eyeing where the reptile-esque villain is still drying up drool with his hand, "I will keep watch. Perhaps you'd like to go take a nap?"

The lizard throws a look of annoyance at Kurogiri as he slips past Kurogiri and disappears through the doorway leading back to where Izuku assumes the villains reside without a word.

Izuku is still watching Hana, who huffs out a breath and finally stands. She crosses back to the bar and pulls herself up onto one of the stools, leaning heavily on her elbow as she watches Izuku.

"Midoriya Izuku?" Izuku barely managed to drag his attention up to the man, yellow eyes slivered in curiosity, "are you alright? You look like you've seen a ghost."

The irony of that would been hilarious if Izuku wasn't suffocating under the fact that Hana was Shigaraki's *elder* sister. This little ghost child was older than Shigaraki. He'd stumbled upon a *fountain of information*.

Wide green eyes watch as the villain walks into the room.

Kurogiri doesn't seem to care that Izuku doesn't say anything, just steps up to the bar. "It's been several hours since you took Advil, would you like more?"

The teen nods numbly and that's all the villain needs before he'd grabbing another glass and turning on the tap to fill it. Hana watches the void-Quirked man with a small frown.

Izuku swallows both the pills and the water with nothing more than

muscle memory, thoughts running rampant as he watches the little girl who watches him right back.

Chapter End Notes

Before I forget again (like I did for the last two chapters I've posted because I have the attention span of a goldfish, apparently) I've got an announcement!!

We got some more beautiful fanart of this fic!! Thank you to CelestialRaisin, both on Ao3 and Instagram, for taking the time to make some art for this fic! I absolutely love it, and I'm so sorry it's taken so long for me to finally remember to share it!

If anyone else feels inspired to make any art for this fic, feel free to drop a link in the comments to it and I'll be sure to feature it in the notes for the rest of the readers to enjoy too! :D

Now, hopefully you all liked this update! It was fun to write when I finally settled on what I wanted to do with it! Sorry for the lack of parental EraserMic, but I assure there will be some in the next update! As always, comments are greatly appreciated, and I love and adore every comment! Thank you so much for reading, and I'll see you in the next update!

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! I'm back again, and I apologize for the wait! I've been lowkey absent, but I'm mostly back now! :) Now, before we hop into this new chapter there are two things I'd like to say, and I'd really appreciate it if you guys could read them before jumping into this chapter!
>
> The first thing: I've noticed a few of you questioning the lack of ghosts in this fic, and I'm sorry to everyone who wanted to see others. I'm not good at character creation, and when starting this, I knew Oboro was going to be the only prominent ghost, hence why Izuku has so much trouble differentiating ghosts and living people. I probably won't include many other ghosts who aren't canon deceased from the series. Sorry once again, but I hope you'll stick around for the story regardless!
>
> The second thing: We've recieved another amazing piece of fanart!! Thank you so much to the lovely artist! Their handles are astronautwithatophat on Ao3, @MarsXur on Twitter and space.mars on Instagram. Show the artists making amazing fanart for this fic some love! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No.”

Shota lifts his head from where he’d had his face hidden in his hands, gaze sweeping towards Hizashi. The blonde had a dangerous glint in his eye as he stares Tsukauchi down over the rim of his regular red-frame glasses.

It’s Shota, Hizashi, Tsukauchi, Vlad King and Nezu all sitting around the rounded table. The hospital had graciously allowed them to borrow a conference room, since Shota had absolutely no intention of leaving the hospital until all thirty-eight students were awake and coherent, unless, of course, word of Izuku and Bakugou’s whereabouts came in, in which case he was planning on raining down *hell*.

“You can’t— *no*, not *can’t*, you *won’t*—” Hizashi stressed the words, his voice a whipping snap that demanded attention and had silence falling over the men in the room, “you will *not* be putting us on the

bench. I refuse to just sit around and twiddle my thumbs while two of *my* students have been kidnapped!"

"You're too close to this," Tsukauchi huffed as he tugged his hat off his head, setting it down on the table top. He ran his fingers through his hair stressfully before focusing his attention back on Hizashi with a brief glance at Shota. "Both of you are. This isn't just two of your students going missing. Izuku is your kid now, and he was taken. I'd never in my *right mind* let any parent of a missing child be an active part of the case, Mic. You know that."

"We are Pro Heroes," Hizashi snaps back, "we aren't just any 'parent' here, Tsukauchi. We're their teachers. We're Pro Heroes. We're supposed to protect them, no matter who their parents are. Sure, Izuku is our kid now but that doesn't change the fact that he was taken by villains on a school trip. That he and Bakugou are gone. It changes nothing that Izuku is our foster son, because before that, he was just our student—and I gotta tell ya, Tsukauchi, I'd tear the world apart for *any* of my students, ya'dig?"

Tsukauchi opens his mouth to reply, eyes narrowed on Hizashi, but he's beaten to the punch by Nezu. The principal stands up in his chair, little paws pressed against the edge of the table as he surveys over the chaos. The rat clears his throat, and instantly, Tsukauchi's mouth clicks shut.

"Though I admit I'm not quite sold on the two of you being active in this investigation due to various reasons—" Nezu smiles blandly, pointedly looking between Shota and Hizashi, "—I *have* known the two of you long enough to know that no matter what's decided in this room, it won't stop either of you from pursuing this. Trust in this, Detective Tsukauchi, Aizawa-kun and Yamada-kun have no intention of just letting you handle this."

Neither of the two mentioned men even have the decency to look sheepish, both just pointedly staring at the detective across the table. Nezu has known them since they were teenagers, if anyone would be able to read them like two open books, it would be the most intelligent creature Japan has to offer, who just so happens to have been their *teacher* all those years ago as well.

Shota's eye flick between the Detective, his boss and Hizashi.

Tsukauchi looks beat, deflating under the rodent's words as he shoots a hesitant glance between Hizashi and Nezu, Nezu himself looks oddly

pleased, though there is a flicker of uncertainty in his beady black eyes and Hizashi really does look seconds away from burning the world to the ground if it'll help get the boys back.

Shota blows out a breath through his nose as he tries to organize his thoughts. He slumps down in his chair as he regards Tsukauchi with a frown. The tension in the room is sharp, but Shota can't just sit here while everyone glares between themselves.

It's not helping anything. They're sitting around bickering about who *can* and *can't* be a part of the investigation—who can and can't *help* find two missing teen— when they should be trying to find and rescue his students. It's illogical. It's plain *stupid*.

There are students missing.

There are two *parents* missing a child.

Shota had had to tell two parents that their son had been kidnapped. The Bakugou family had been the first informed of what went down at the boot camp. Of what was lost—even if they didn't disclose the second kidnapped child's identity, even if Shota knew the Bakugous have known Izuku far longer than he and Hizashi.

He and Hizashi are missing a child.

The reminding thought rears at his heart and constricts suffocatingly around the muscle.

Izuku is missing.

He can just squeeze his eyes shut and hope the moment of sheer panic passes quickly. Drowning in emotions won't help rescue those kids.

The League of Villains, the same group who'd attacked the USJ and had *almost* taken out All Might after making quick work of both Shota himself and Thirteen, currently had two of their students. This wasn't the time to be at each other's throats debating whether people were able to aid in finding these missing kids.

Bakugou and Izuku are in serious *danger*, and the five of them are sitting around *arguing*.

Shota narrows his eyes on Tsukauchi, and, almost as if feeling the gaze, Tsukauchi's attentions flicks towards Shota. The underground Hero cocks one eyebrow, "what exactly do you have on this so far?"

If Tsukauchi is annoyed by the persistent shift in conversation topic, in a direction he's blatantly *against*, he doesn't say anything about it.

Instead, Tsukauchi heaves a sigh at the question and tips his head back so he's staring at the ceiling. He's quiet for a long, long second before he's letting his gaze settle back on the men sitting around him, leaning heavily back in his chair as he does so.

"The League of Villains have been on our radar since before the USJ attack—though I can't say we considered them an active threat until the USJ. To be completely honest, we don't have a lot of intel. It's hard to track people who have a gateway to new destinations. When we get even the slightest bit to close, they jump ship and disappear without a trace through those voids. And, as I'm sure we're all aware at this point, as soon as they step through that void-portal, they could be anywhere. I'm not even sure their limitations reside in Japan solely, that's just how little we actually know.

"Not to mention that there are very few Pros who've actually encountered the group, let alone have anything useful for us. At this point we hardly know more than the fact that Shigaraki Tomura is the leader, and the warp-quirked villain goes by Kurogiri."

"And what came up when you ran those two names through your database?"

"Nothing," Tsukauchi answers Nezu with a grimace. "Neither of those identities even exist. We're at a loss. There's not a lot we can do with just names, especially when they're obviously aliases. No previous criminal activity that's known. No fingerprints. No DNA. Fake names. And, nothing came up when we ran their Quirks through either—nothing has been filed under 'decay' or 'warp', or any other synonyms for those two Quirks, so we really don't have anything to work with."

The detective pauses, glances up towards the ceiling again, like he racking his brain for more useful knowledge before he's glancing back at the group, "there's been reports of other members, but nothing concrete. My best guess is that Shigaraki has at least five villains working directly for him, but we all know he has connections. Dozens of villains attacked the USJ, he shouldn't be underestimated."

"So we have no idea what we're working with," Vlad summarizes with a huff. It's odd to see the way the built, stony man sinks into his chair just the same as anyone else. Logically, Shota knows he's a man just the same as any of them (sans Nezu), but it's still startling to see.

“Shigaraki could have a whole army hidden away, and we wouldn’t know.”

The detective’s face falls slightly, but he makes no attempt at denying Vlad’s words.

“Who do you have working on this case?” Nezu asks calmly, whiskers arching forwards in interest.

Another sigh leaves Tsukauchi’s lungs as he finally sits up straighter and cocks his attention down to Nezu, “I have a couple colleagues who’ve been a part of the case since it started, but besides them, it’s been confidential. I’ve been select about who I trust to work the case up until now.”

“*Confidential*?” Hizashi narrows his eyes, “why?”

Tsukauchi hesitates, eyes darting to Nezu before looking back at the two husbands seated almost thigh to thigh at the table. It’s not hard to tell that the Detective is trying to formulate a response. Nezu doesn’t look confused, so Shota just knows the rodent is in on whatever’s happening. Figures.

Shota studies Tsukauchi, blinks once, then twice before his mouth falls open in surprise, “All Might.”

“What?” Hizashi jerks his head to look at Shota, but Shota’s narrowed eyes are bouncing between an almost guilty looking Tsukauchi, and an intent Nezu. Nezu is studying Shota, whiskers flicking in that pleased way they do when he’s bordering on *pleased*.

“What does All Might have to do with all this?” Shota straightens up from where he’s slumped, leaning towards Tsukauchi. “Don’t play dumb on this, Tsukauchi, All Might has something to do with this. There are kids missing, what the hell is going on?”

The Detective is quiet for another long second before he shakes his head, “I’m sorry, Eraser, but I’m not at liberty to say. It *is* confidential —”

“Our kids are missing!” Hizashi’s slams his palms down on the table top, “confidential my ass, Tsukauchi, what could the League possibly want with two Heroics students? Why do they keep targeting us? What the hell does all this have to do with Yagi?”

“I can’t tell you,” Tsukauchi frowns apologetically. He really does look

torn and sympathetic, but fury swirls in Shota's stomach despite his words. Two children are missing—now is not the time for secrecy. "We will find those two boys. We will bring Izuku and Katsuki home. We have officers and Pros on the case. They will be found."

"How can you be so sure?" Vlad's arms cross over his chest, unwavering gaze casted at Tsukauchi.

It's nice to have someone else on their side—Vlad had been there too. He'd seen the shitshow unfold. He'd suffered the hardship of the attack as well. He'd put himself on the line for his students, and waded through the aftermath just as Shota and the Pussycats had.

Sekijiro had to deal with the fact that they'd lost two students, even if the two students weren't technically his own. He'd been there too.

Shota will admit he and Vlad don't always get along; he doesn't even really know where that stupid rivalry he hardly plays into came from, but they're on the same playing field right now. They're both guilty, and furious, and upset. They're equally responsible for the two students going missing, even if Shota can't help but feel like he's solely responsible.

Vlad cocks an eyebrow as he shifts tensely in his chair, "you said yourself you're at a loss. How the hell do you plan on magically finding where the students are being held captive?"

"We have connections," Tsukauchi clears his throat. "There are probably vigilantes who know more details about this. They get closer to the villains. They see more, are more involved without abiding by the laws like the rest of us. There's got to be someone who knows something, we just have to find them—"

This startles a laugh out of Shota. It's dark and tired and *not* funny, but he laughs anyways. Hizashi's hand squeezes at his knee, and everyone glances towards him, faces furrowed with confusion.

Shota can't help the way his tone turns sarcastic, "*you're* going to target *vigilantes* for information?"

Tsukauchi bristles, eyebrows drawn together in surprise. The detective opens his mouth, shuts it sharply before finally finding his voice, "vigilantes have just as much interaction with villains as the Pros do, Eraser. Probably even more, someone has to know something about the League—"

“That won’t work. They aren’t going to talk to you, Tsukauchi.” Shota tells him tiredly, like he’s talking to a *child*. Shota doesn’t know why the Detective is so convinced everything will fall into place like this, but it *won’t*. “You’re the police—what they do is illegal. Read between the lines.”

“There are two kid’s lives on the line, Eraser—”

“That won’t matter,” the underground Hero scoffs, “you’re not to be trusted. It doesn’t matter what you say; what you *offer* them. What plea, or sob story you offer up. Words mean nothing, Tsukauchi. You are their enemy just as much as the villains they fight are. They won’t trust you. You are the law enforcement, and I know for a fact you’ve tried to arrest nearly half of the vigilantes protecting this city at one point or another.”

“It’s my *job*, Aizawa,” Tsukauchi snaps back, his mask of *cool and collected* cracking away. It’s almost shocking to see Tsukauchi’s façade crumbling under the stress. He’s known Tsukauchi for a lot of years now, and on some days, he might even consider them friends, but it’s not often he lets the stress get to him.

“Now, now,” Nezu smiles tightly, paws waving in a placating gesture. “We are all frustrated, but we must all remember we’re on the same team. We all want the same thing: those two boys brought home safe and sound.”

The rodent pauses before his gaze is back on Tsukauchi, “Aizawa-kun has a point, Detective. The vigilantes have no reason to aid you or any other law enforcement official, even if this case is of utmost importance and there are children’s lives on the line. They will not trust you, as Aizawa-kun mentioned—”

“We can’t do nothing,” Tsukauchi narrows his eyes at Nezu. Shota can’t help but think it’s bold that he’d cut Nezu off, and it’s clearly a mutual thought when he, Vlad and Hizashi all share a glance. “They are our best bet at finding those boys—at finding the League!”

“I didn’t say we should do nothing,” the corner of Nezu’s lips twitch, but his taut smile doesn’t wane. “I’m simply saying *you* are not who we need to mediate, Detective Tsukauchi.”

The silence that settles after Nezu stops talking is quiet enough that you could hear a pin drop.

“What?” Tsukauchi blinks owlishly after a moment of stunned silence.

Nezu waits a second longer before finally speaking, “it’s no question that we need outside help. Vigilantes draw that line between criminal and Hero, so I suspect you’re correct when you say someone somewhere must know something—but it’s absurd of us to play a cat and mouse game targeting vigilantes when there’s a far simpler solution.”

“Which is?” Vlad cocks an eyebrow.

Nezu smiles brightly, head lulling in Shota’s direction.

The dark-haired man narrows his eyes at the rodent, not shifting from his slouch. Nezu gives back just as fiercely as he’s receiving, smile widening when as Shota’s scowl deepens, “you’ve got to be joking.”

“I'm not,” Nezu chirps. “It’s no secret you have a soft spot for the vigilantes, surely the detective is bound to know that—” a glance at an unimpressed, yet not surprised Tsukauchi proves that, “—and I know quite a few Underground Heroes share the same sentiment, and have also turned a blind eye when it comes to vigilantes."

“Hang on,” Hizashi frowns, “you want Shota to be out gathering intel? Now? He’s running on three days without actual sleep, two of his students have been kidnapped by the same people who muddled his brain around in his head like a mojito, half of his class is hospital bound and you want him to just jump into patrol and harass vigilantes for information?”

“Hizashi.” Shota warns softly. It hardly gets through to the blonde who’s still glaring daggers at Nezu.

“No,” Nezu’s smile softens the faintest bit, almost amused at Hizashi’s antics, “I’m very aware of Aizawa-kun's current state. He’s in no place to be actively patrolling, nor would I trust him to hold a civil conversation for long.”

Shota doesn’t know whether he should be relieved or offended. “I’m fine.”

“What I was getting at,” Nezu bulldozes right over Shota’s words, “was the fact that we’ll have far more success if we branch out and ask underground Heroes to ask any vigilante they happen across on patrol about the League of Villains. A handful of vigilantes *trust* some of the Pros they come into contact with on patrol. Trust is a two-way street, that’s a starting point. We’ll have better odds if it’s someone familiar to them asking questions instead of the police pressing for information

with the threat of incarceration looming overhead, even if it's not verbally threatened. Surely you understand, Detective?"

"We can't share to many details," Tsukauchi replies, mouth pulled in a straight line. "It's a matter of National Security."

"So we don't mention All Might," Hizashi huffs, "there are two kids missing. Pros will want to help. Vigilantes will want to help if there's no risk of getting arrested. I mean, *we* didn't even think Yagi was involved until you started talking about confidentiality—probably wouldn't have guessed at all if Sho didn't connect the dots."

"I concur," Nezu nods sharply, "we won't even mention All Might, or even the police. If the request for help extends from Aizawa-kun, who has a good relationship with both his fellow underground Heroes and the vigilantes he comes into contact with, we won't risk mentioning Yagi's involvement, whatever that may be."

His whiskers twitch, and Shota has a sinking feeling that Nezu definitely knows what *whatever that may be* is. That rat is always in the know, whether people want him there or not.

"Our priority as of now, is to locate and rescue Bakugou Katsuki and Midoriya Izuku," Nezu continues easily. "Everything else will come second to me and my staff until those two students are safe."

"Of course," Tsukauchi nods hurriedly, "that's our main goal as well. Civilian safety comes first. We will bring those two boys home safely."

"Of course," Nezu repeats, little paws interlacing together. "Now then," he chimes brightly, looking between his three staff members, "you three are dismissed. The Detective and I have some things to discuss. I understand this is quite difficult, so please do remember to take care of yourselves. I will find you later, so, until then."

Vlad is the first to dismiss himself, followed by Shota and Hizashi standing to follow, "oh, Aizawa-kun?"

Shota paused, turning his head slowly to see Nezu's lead lulled once again in his direction. He hasn't moved an inch, nose twitching as his black eyes track Shota's movements, "a moment please?"

Hizashi pauses as well, but Shota takes one look in Nezu's eyes and decides it's best to not try and push the rat. He cocks an eyebrow as he gives Hizashi's shoulder a gentle push towards the door. The blonde hesitates for just a second before finally slipping out and

pulling it shut behind him.

Hizashi also knows when not to push Nezu.

“Yeah?” Shota huffs once the door has clicked shut, finally turning back towards the room, arms crossing over his chest when he’s suddenly aware of how he’s awkwardly holding them at his sides. Nezu’s eyes track the movements intently, but he thankfully doesn’t mention it.

“I understand that it’s difficult to just *wait* when two students are missing,” Nezu’s voice has softened to something Shota isn’t even sure he’s ever heard before in the entire time he’s known the stoat. “We’re all on high alert, and we’re doing everything we can to find our students. This does not fall solely on you, Aizawa-kun. We are all to blame. We *all* could’ve done better—Yuuei and myself especially.”

Shota decides then that he must *really* look like shit if he’s getting a pep talk from Nezu. If he’s being consoled by quite possibly one of the most cunning creatures he’s ever come into contact with.

Shota doesn’t speak, just watches his boss uncertainly.

“Now, there are a few more things to discuss,” Nezu finally continues when he realizes Shota isn’t going to talk, “but for now, please try to rest. The Detective and I will iron out some of the final details, and then I will find you. You’re welcome to start reaching out to any of your underground mutuals who you think might be of assistance, but I do urge you to take a small break before that. Things will only get harder from here, Aizawa-kun, and I need you to be prepared.”

“Alright,” Shota bows his head. It’s no use arguing. Shota can take this for what it really is, Nezu has things in the works, and Shota is bound to be a part of that. He’s being granted some downtime.

“I take it you’ll be around in the hospital?” Nezu’s voice has returned to the chipper brightness that he tends to always fall behind, but Shota hears the gravity of the situation. He gives Nezu the same curtesy of not mentioning it that Nezu had offered him earlier, and instead shoots his boss a flat look that perfectly conveys his response, even without words.

The stoat lets out a huff of laughter, smiling at Shota in a clear wordless dismissal.

The dark-haired man eyes the two remaining men in the room before

swiftly turning on his heels and following his co-workers out of the room. He lets the door click shut behind him, and huffs out a snort of exhausted laughter as Hizashi, who'd been leaning against the wall right across from the door, jerks up to his full height.

Nezu waits for exactly one minute, listening to the receding footsteps of Aizawa and Yamada before finally turning his full attention to the detective at his side. Neither of them have moved an inch, each just staring at the other thoughtfully, gearing up for the continuation of the conversation.

"I trust that Yagi will be the next informed of what was discussed here?" Nezu stares intently at the Detective, fingers still interlaced, but now squeezing tightly. "Though I can't say I'm pleased that I have to keep my trusted staff in the dark, I do understand why. When I agreed to let Yagi teach at Yuuei so he could find a successor, I didn't anticipate anything like this ever happening; there have been at least *two* attacks on my school, and we haven't even finished the first semester."

"He's my next stop," Tsukauchi bows his head in agreement. "All for One is a dangerous man. He'll stop at nothing to kill All Might. To kill One for All. And we can assume that Shigaraki and the League of Villains are just as dangerous."

"Which begs the question of if All for One and the League of Villains know who Midoriya Izuku is," Nezu hums blandly in reply. "I don't take lightly to my students being in danger, Tsukauchi. We don't know why Bakugou and Midoriya were really taken. We don't know what these villains have planned for them. There is nothing we can do, and not even the Number One Hero can help us as of current."

Tsukauchi blows out a breath, rubbing at his eyes, "I know."

The detective pauses, digging his palms deeper into his eyes, "we just need a location, then we can send All Might in. The only thing we can do is sit on our hands and wait. We can't do anything until we know *where* we need to be. I don't like that we're handing this over to underground Heroes and Vigilantes; we're throwing unsuspecting people into a dangerous fight and not even giving them a heads up."

"We're asking for *information*," Nezu shakes his head, "and even that we might not get. What this all boils down to is word of mouth and *luck*, neither of which I enjoy relying on."

"Yeah, I really don't like this," Tsukauchi repeats, finally picking his

hat up and settling it back on his head.

“Neither do I,” Nezu agrees, “it’s in no way a sound plan, but we’re grasping at straws. Anything is better than nothing detective. We’ll have more luck letting trusted Heroes try to get some answers then we will arresting or cornering vigilantes via your means.”

Shota can’t even think about arguing the fact the Hizashi gently wraps an arm around his shoulders and leads him away from the conference room they’d all been using. He knows, logically, he should be worried about his class of gremlins seeing them act so domestic, that even if they’re not all topping the classes when it comes to grades that they can all read between the lines. That they’re all nosy little brats who can, and *will* snoop for information.

If he weren’t so worried about Izuku, and Bakugou, and the rest of his students, and the mess the media will be making of this, and *All Might*, and, God, just about everything else under the sun that could, and probably will go wrong—not to mention how emotionally drained he is, he might’ve even had the half-thought to shove Hizashi away.

He doesn’t.

He just falls into step with his husband and hopes that none of his hell class catch them.

He knows a decent half of his class is bed-bound, and the remaining lot of them have been increasingly protective of their still hospitalized friends. It makes his check-in patrols a hell of a lot easier when it comes to visiting a handful of rooms and being able to count to his full (*almost*) roster without scouring the hospital.

Visiting hours have long since passed as the evening steadily crawls up.

Bakugou and Izuku have been missing for almost twenty-four hours. The thought makes Shota’s stomach churn. He has two kids missing, and there’s nothing he can do. Nothing the police can do—hell, there isn’t even anything All Might can do.

Despite visiting hours being over, they’d somehow managed to talk the hospital staff into allowing the students to stay, even if they weren’t admitted. Maybe it was the desperation in Shota’s eyes when he asks, or the fact that this was a Pro Hero, Yuuei High School business that made them cave, he’s not sure.

Either way, Shota can't say it isn't a weight off his chest to have all his students contained in the same building. To be able to slink down a hospital corridor and do a headcount without even announcing himself.

All of the student's guardians had been called and informed of what took place at the bootcamp. Some parents had arrived in to be with their children, while others had conveyed their relief over the phone and settled for speaking to their children. Neither Shota or Vlad disclosed that any of the children had gone missing—it was only a matter of time until the news sunk its teeth into it and it was *everywhere*.

They didn't need terrified parents and guardians hurrying that process along. The more time they had to figure this out without it being center of attention, the better.

Shota is so lost in his thoughts that he's hardly even aware that they're now in a secluded little sitting area. They're hidden away by a wall of fake potted plants and to-green greenery. It's not overly secluded: it's not closed off, just hidden.

Still, he can't bring it upon himself to care about that when Hizashi's arms are wrapping around him, and holding him tight. As he buries his own face in the crook of the blonde's neck. Hizashi is shaking, and it takes Shota a second too long to realize so is he.

It's no secret Hizashi has been crying—his eyes are almost as red as the frames of his glasses, and though he's not an ugly cryer, his cheeks and nose are still dusted with redness and it looks like he'd been crying.

Shota almost wishes that he could cry too.

But, then again, he thinks if he started crying now, he wouldn't be able to stop.

It's Shota who pulls away from the hug first, but not entirely. He snakes a hand around Hizashi's waist and leads them both to the leather loveseat settled between two matching armchairs and a magazine covered coffee table. All Might's face is on more than half the covers, and Shota wonders if it would petty of him to flip them over.

Hizashi plops down first, and Shota is pulled along. He doesn't resist, just falls into Hizashi's side. They sit in silence for a while, just

enjoying the other's company. Vlad is doing his round around the hospital—quite a few of his students were left unconscious due to the gas, so there are more rooms for him to check.

Shota doubts their colleague will even look for them, unless something goes wrong.

"How're you holding up?"

Shota lets his head lull in Hizashi's direction, a frown pinched on his lips. He wants to turn the question around on Hizashi, repeat it back and expect his own state to be brushed over—but he knows it won't. Hizashi won't do that.

"As well as someone who lost two teenagers can be," Shota replies drily. Bitterly.

"It's not your fault, Shota," Hizashi whispers.

"I was supposed to protect them, Hizashi." Shota hisses under his breath. "And I didn't."

"So were Sekijiro and the Pussycats," Hizashi fires back, tone neutral. When Shota doesn't look towards him, the blonde hooks a finger under Shota's chin and directs his attention onto him, "there were six Pro Heroes there, Shota, not one. This isn't your fault. If you don't blame Kan, or the Pussycats, and I *know* you don't, you *can't* blame yourself either."

He wants to argue—really, he does.

A heated retort sits on the tip of his tongue, one that he's sure will annoy and frustrate Hizashi to no end, but even when he opens his mouth to force the words out, to deny Hizashi's words and take full responsibility for his inability to keep the boys safe, nothing comes out.

The angry words die on his tongue, and instead he just stares at the doorway between the wall and the mock-wall of fake potted plants. His eyes ache in that way they do when his body is trying to cry, but with no success, so he squeezes his eyes shut.

"They're my kids," Shota finally whispers, unable to keep the tremor from his voice.

And it's true. Every year he tells himself he won't get attached to the

newest wave of kids on his roster. Every year he fails. Every year they manage to weasel their way in—but no year quite like his current year. No year has been through what his 1-A kids have been through.

He's always liked kids, even if he'd never admit it.

Maybe he doesn't always *like* his kids— when Bakugou starts small fires where there definitely shouldn't be small fires, or when Kaminari accidentally blows the breaker and causes a school wide blackout. When Iida tries to back-seat teach over him. Or when Kirishima accidentally breaks a desk with his Quirk, or Uraraka gets school property stuck to the roof with hers.

Maybe he doesn't always like them, but he never stops *caring*.

Their flaws are almost charming, or, they are almost charming after the fact. When he's staring up at various school supplies decorating his ceiling, his office chair amongst them for whatever reason, or when he extinguishes a small fire spreading through a training gym, he can't say it's very charming.

"I know, Sho," Hizashi mutters, and that's when Shota realizes he'd been tugged into Hizashi's chest, that his nose his squished against his husband's shoulder, and his eyes have slipped hit, the ache of lack of sleep, and Quirk overuse and just keeping his eyes open for too long easing.

They cling to each other for a while. Hizashi may be crying again, but Shota's not sure. He doesn't have the motivation to lift his head and check. Isn't even sure he'd want to see Hizashi cry if he is crying. He's not sure he could take seeing his husband cry right now.

When Shota can think straight, and his eyes don't burn when he opens them, the underground Hero pulls his phone out. If he wants help fast, he needs to get the word out before night patrols start.

There are a handful trusted underground Heroes that he trusts to help, and he even has a few Vigilantes saved in his phone contacts as well, who he reaches out to directly.

It can't hurt to get the message out directly through Vigilantes, he knows there are circles and that quite a few meet up. They're more likely to talk among each other than to a Pro Hero or an officer.

He keeps his messages broad when addressing the vigilantes—the less they know the better. He doubts they'll even want any more details

than he gives, they just need to know enough to get the job done. He makes sure not to mention anything about the police, or All Might, just asks that anyone who knows any information about the League of Villains contact him, or anonymously report it to the police.

Tsukauchi had mentioned a direct line to his men so they could keep this as contained as possible.

He's praying something will come up.

Anything.

By the time Kacchan wakes up, the bar is filled with villains. Izuku had periodically seen all of these villains throughout the evening, one or two usually keeping watch on them, even if Kacchan was still out cold, and Izuku was fairly useless with his limbs busted.

He keeps his head ducked as the villains talk to Kacchan—listening silently to their plans. He's thankful they don't seem to intent on hurting the explosive teen, but then again, they are being held captive.

Shigaraki's proposition for Kacchan sinks into Izuku's gut like a stone.

They want him to join their side.

They want Kacchan, who's been stuck on being a Hero for just as long as Izuku has, to join forces with them.

A small part of Izuku can see it—Kacchan doesn't always have the attitude of a Hero. He doesn't usually work well in a team setting, and he hates having to rely on anyone who isn't himself. He's brash, and doesn't always think things through. He gets caught up in his own ego sometimes, and he did have a period of his life where he hadn't been a nice person. Where he could be considered a bully.

Clearly the League had picked up on it. They'd kidnapped him in hopes of getting him to join their side. Playing into what they assumed was resentment.

They'd seen the Sports Festival.

They'd seen Bakugou snarl and spit like a caged animal—they'd seen him be restrained and muzzled, and Izuku's not sure he'll ever really forgive the school for what they'd done to Kacchan on live television,

he would've come to his childhood friend's defense if he hadn't been out of commission in Recovery Girl's office.

There's something oddly pleasing about how Kacchan can't even contain his anger when chained to a chair and being held captive. When he snarls in Shigaraki's face as the Villain leans closer like he thinks he's getting through to Kacchan and he's angry *for* their cause, instead of boiling anger directed *at* the League of Villains.

Izuku hadn't believed for a second Kacchan would join them. Now that he knows why they're here, he can't help but think it's silly. They risked capture to kidnapped a student who they knew had a temper and a bad attitude, and they didn't even entertain the idea that Kacchan wasn't as resentful as they thought. That he didn't want to be a Hero with his whole entire being. That he didn't still idolize All Might, even if he's doesn't act like it.

The League ignores Izuku for the most part, who counts himself lucky. Kacchan had only glanced down at him once, eyebrows drown between worry and flaming anger. He hadn't drawn any attention to Izuku when the muzzle was stripped off his face, and Izuku thinks he must not look great if Kacchan is trying to keep the League distracted so they don't focus their attention on him.

It's not long until Shigaraki gets fed up with Kacchan. Izuku doesn't think the League of Villain's leader had expected to try so hard to need to convince Katsuki to join them, nor had he expected to bash heads with the teenager as much as he had.

The leader's mouth is pulled in a vicious snarl, and his fingers tense at his side like he's refraining from decaying something to relieve his own frustrations. He turns on his heels and strides out of the room telling his followers not to bother him.

Dabi makes a joke about Shigaraki having another tantrum that only a videogame console can calm. Most of the villains laugh—well, except Kurogiri and the one Izuku thinks is called Magne.

Kacchan remains quiet at Izuku's side, but he doesn't need to glance up to see if he's still conscious. His muscles are tense, and his finger taps a frustrated patter against the chair's armrest. Kacchan's breaths come out slow, but not as slow as they had been when he'd been unconscious.

He's just stewing.

For a while they sit in silence as the bar comes to life around them. The League of Villains do their own thing, talking, arguing and laughing. Not a soul comes in, and Izuku wonders if they're even open.

Kacchan says nothing, and neither does Izuku.

One by one the villains seem to disappear as the night carries on. First Dabi and Toga, who leave out the door in the bar, the one Izuku assumes leads to the outside world. An escape point if they weren't both tied up or injured. Magne leaves to the back where Shigaraki had gone, and Spinner and Twice follow after her.

Mr. Compress sits at the bar with Kurogiri, and the two converse quietly, but it's not much time later that the masked villain is disappearing through the doorway as well.

That leaves Izuku and Kacchan under Kurogiri's watchful eye. Izuku knows he's not to be trusted, that he's a villain just as the rest of the League, but he can't help but blow out a relieved breath when the bar is finally empty.

"Your friend really upset Tenko," Izuku turns slowly to where Hana is stood in the doorway. He hadn't seen her since before the League of Villains gathered. Since before Kacchan woke up.

Her arms are laced over his chest in that way children attempt to look threatening. She's glaring at Kacchan, but her lip is poked out in a pout.

"Tenko's very mad," she continues as she finally steps into the room, standing nearly toe to toe with Kacchan, eyes narrowed. She eyes him before seeming to deflate a little, head lulling towards Izuku. "Why... why is this guy so angry?"

"I'm sorry," Izuku tells her, simply to placate her. Her face screws up in that way it had earlier when he'd apologized for their father mistreating Shigaraki.

Kacchan whips around to look at Izuku in surprise, "the fuck're you apologizing for, Deku?"

"Wait... is he really your friend?" She leans forwards, eyeing him sharply, "he seems like a meanie."

"He is," Izuku assures, ignoring Katsuki. "Um, n-not a meanie, usually.

But he, um, is. Really. And he's not mad, that's how he always looks."

"Are you fuckin' talking about me?" Kacchan's voice has the usual anger, but none of the volume. His eyes dart to the villain behind the bar before his glare is back down on Izuku. Izuku ignores him again.

"You're so weird," the little girl chimes, finally stepping back from Katsuki to settle in front of Izuku. "You're talking to me with him and Kurogiri in the room. Why?"

"Kacchan knows what I can do," Izuku explains lowly, so Kurogiri doesn't hear. The void-Quirked villain doesn't stir from where he's still organizing the bar. He doesn't think he needs to explain what he means to the ghost, especially since they'd had this conversation already earlier. "And Kurogiri is busy."

"Holy shit," Kacchan mutters at Izuku's side, "your ghost is here. Thank fuck, he better fuckin' be able to help us outta this shit."

"No," Izuku's heart seizes in his chest at the reminder of the ghost he's missing. He really wishes Oboro was here honestly. Even if Oboro couldn't physically help, he could pass on directions. He could get them help. Hitoshi knows Oboro exists, Oboro could've told him. "He's'not. She's from here."

"You have a ghost friend?" Hana asks softly, drawing her knees up to her chest.

"I do," Izuku nods, "he... he didn't make it to me in time. The, um, the gateway closed before he could."

"Fucking hell," Kacchan groans under his breath, obviously listening along and piecing things together as he goes, "of course that shitty *light flickerer* didn't make it. The one time we need the bastard. Speaking of, what the hell're you even doing here, Deku? Last I checked, you *weren't* the target. Why'd you get yourself kidnapped, dumbass?"

"Like I'd let you get kidnapped alone," Izuku snaps back in annoyance. Maybe it's the fact he's been awake this whole time, or the fact both of his arms are broken and they *hurt*, but his patience is running thin. "Your dumb ego would just get you killed if you were here by yourself."

"Big talk from the one with two broken arms," Katsuki sneers. "Like I need a Deku like you with me. I can hold my own, thank you very

fuckin' much."

"You're such an ass," Izuku shakes his head.

"And you're a *dumb*ass," Kacchan fires back, eyes flicking to his two very broken arms and his bruising face. "Looks like your rescue plan worked out remarkable well, huh, Deku? Got yourself kidnapped too instead of going to the fucking hospital where you *should* be."

"Is he... worried about you?" Hana, who'd been watching the interaction in interest, frowns.

"Yes," Izuku sucks in a breath through his nose, happy Kacchan doesn't know what's being said. Last thing he needs is to piss the explosive teen off even more. "He is. He's always been like this, don't worry."

"What the fuck're you saying—"

"Ignore him," Izuku offers softly to Hana when the little girl's eyes jump nervously between them. "He's like me; a Hero-in training too. He's a good guy."

"Him?" Hana's face pinches in surprise as she gives Kacchan another onceover, "seriously? I believed it when he was asleep, but now I don't know. Are you *really* sure?"

"Deadly," Izuku deadpans, and it has the desired effect when the little girl snorts out a laugh. Kacchan lets out a defeated huff at Izuku's side, and seems to settle into silence.

"How was your friend going to help?" Hana asks after a second of silence. Her chin it tucked between her knees as she stares at Izuku, features twisted in confusion. "Could... could I help?"

"I don't think so," Izuku shakes his head with a thankful smile, "he... um, he can do things like—"

"Play with fucking lights and scare the shit outta people," Kacchan glares across the room. Izuku doesn't know how his childhood friend knows what he's talking about, but he rolls with it. "Somehow manages to be a little shit without being heard, or visible or hardly even fuckin' existing."

"Uh... yeah. I-I, uh, I guess? But he's also good at getting people's attention. So, if he knew where we were, he might be able to bring

help. There are a lot of people looking for us, and... he might be able to lead them here, if he knew where we were, at least."

"Oh," she worries her bottom lip between her teeth, "what would happen to Tenko? If... if the people looking for you found you here?"

His silence is answer enough.

He doesn't know how to explain all the bad things the Villain has done—attacking the school, nearly killing two Pro Heroes. Kidnapping. He'd obviously be arrested, and rightfully so, but that's not something you tell a little girl about her beloved little brother.

She seems to get the gist, "oh."

"I don't even think you could help," Izuku carries on softly, "you'd have to be able to find people you've never met before, and there's no telling where they even *are*. And then you'd need to get their attention —"

"Can all ghosts fuck around with shit?" The question comes from Kacchan, and Izuku pauses for a second. "Or is it just your asshole ghost friend?"

The green-haired teen frowns. The lights always seem like a pretty easy task—he used to ask ghosts to flicker his lights when he was little, but none had ever really done much more, not that they were around a lot.

He's curious though.

"Can you play with things? Like... like the lights, or touch things? Make them move?"

"Not really," Hana huffs, "well, sorta? I guess. I can make it flicker, but then I get really tired. And I can make Tenko's games turn off—he gets very mad. Always yells a whole bunch. It's funny."

Izuku likes how the little girl's smile curls fondly as she speaks, but then he remembers she's talking about Shigaraki. The Villain who tried to kill Shota. The Villain keeping the hostage, who'd targeted them during a school event and kidnapped them.

"Okay," Izuku says, trying to refocus on the topic, "I don't think you'd be able to help much then. That's okay, though."

She looks torn between remorse and relief as she nods. After seeing that face, Izuku knows that even if she could help, he wouldn't ask that of her. There's a loyalty to her brother that he doesn't quite understand, and he doesn't want to force or trick her into anything.

They settle into another silence, which is broken by Kacchan, who's looking around the room suspiciously, "how many are there in a dump like this?"

Izuku glances around too, in an attempt to spot any ghosts, but he only sees Hana. He turns his attention to her, only to find her watching him. He cocks an eyebrow in question.

"Me," she says proudly. "There *were* others too though; like mom and dad, and grandma and grandpa, but they all left. Sometimes they come back and visit, but they don't stay long. Not like me. And then there are the people that die here. I don't like when that happens, but they don't stay here for long either. They're very noisy, cry a lot."

"Why do you stay then?" Izuku asks carefully, softly.

The girl hesitates, "I don't like what Sensei does."

She's quiet for a long second, eyes locked on the ground, "he's very mean, but he pretends like loves Tenko. I don't think he does though. He does bad things to him. I don't want to leave him alone..."

"What—" Izuku swallows down the fear, "what does he do?"

Hana opens he mouth to respond, but shuts it with a desperate shake of her head, "bad things."

Izuku decides not to press, even if he really, *really* wants to.

"What do you know about Sensei?"

Izuku feels Kacchan's eyes on him, but he doesn't look away from Hana. She's playing with a thread on her shirt, deliberately not looking at him.

"I don't... he scares me," she offers, "when he... when he takes Tenko back, I don't, *c-can't*, um, be there. Tenko used to scream... I don't know. B-but he um, he is sorta nice to Tenko sometimes, like he gave him Kurogiri. Kurogiri's been taking care of him for a long time now. I'm glad he has him."

“He— what does that… what do you mean? *Gave him*?”

Hana puckers her lips in thought, before shrugging her shoulders, “I don’t really know. He um, he just sorta showed up one day with Sensei. He’s taken good care of Tenko since then, and it’s funny because Tenko’s a brat most of the time. I don’t know where Sensei found him, or… or what they did to him, but, um, I think he really loves Tenko now. He’s never left since meeting Tenko.”

Izuku lets his eyes drift to where Kurogiri is wiping the counter. Almost as if feeling his gaze, yellow glowing eyes flicker towards him and his head faintly cocks to the side. Izuku looks away abruptly.

So… Kurogiri is a hired babysitter? A nanny? Is he even… is he a villain? Yes, of course he is. He tried to kill Izuku’s whole class. He knowingly dropped them around the USJ with the intention of them being killed by the dozens of villains stalking around. That’s *villainous*.

Still, how’d All for One even find someone like Kurogiri—someone blindly loyal? Someone who’d put their own life on the line for someone like Shigaraki? It doesn’t make sense—but, then again, nothing around here makes any sense.

He’s still having a hard time wrapping his brain around it. What could Kurogiri’s motives be? Why stick around when Shigaraki acts the way he does? Why remain so loyal if there’s nothing in it for him?

“Midoriya Izuku?” Izuku jerks his attention up to where Kurogiri is watching him, “are you alright?”

Kacchan tenses at Izuku’s side, lip pulled in a vicious snarl, “of course he’s not fucking alright! He’s got two broken arms for Christ’s sake, and you fuckin’ assholes are keeping him here!”

Kurogiri’s face doesn’t change as his yellow eyes drift towards Kacchan. If he had a mouth, Izuku would think it would be pulled in an annoyed, chiding line. It’s probably the most annoyed Izuku has seen Kurogiri since he’d woken up.

Figures it would be Kacchan to unknowingly rile up the patient villain. Of course.

“I-I’m,” Izuku shakes his head, trying to rid himself of his thoughts, “I’m fine. U-um, thank you.”

Izuku doesn’t need to look over to know Kacchan is sporting a

bewildered look. That he's astonished. Maybe even a little miffed, or even worried. Izuku had just *thanked* his *captor*, but Kacchan doesn't know Kurogiri has been feeding him Advil every four to five hours since he'd woken up.

Kurogiri doesn't respond other than bowing his head. He returns to his tasks, ignoring the two teenagers.

"What the fuck is your problem, Deku?" Kacchan seethes under his breath, a few different emotions colouring his tone. "He is not your friend. You can't just be nice to every dickhead you meet; he *kidnapped* you."

"Yeah, well, I've been awake long enough to realize *being* a dickhead won't do us any favors. Stop trying to make enemies when we're at their mercy," Izuku growls back in reply, "you're going to get us killed if you talk to them like that, just like I said!"

"Watch how you fuckin' talk to me, you stupid Deku!"

As it turns out, playing twenty questions with a ghost he can barely answer 'yes' and 'no' questions is pretty hard. Hitoshi finds himself sitting on Izuku's bed for quite a long time with the light overhead flicking on and off and flickering in response to his questions.

They're at it for a good two hours, at least. Long enough that Hitoshi texts his parents that he'll be out for a while 'clearing his head'. He doesn't mention where he's at, because he's nervous they'll come to bring him home and find him sitting on Izuku's bed with the lights flickering on and off, prompted by his words like he's having a séance or something.

He spends the whole morning in Izuku's room, and as much as it pains him to say, they're not that much closer to any answers.

Ro doesn't know a lot. It was expected, but now Hitoshi isn't quite sure what to do.

How to help.

He keeps asking questions though, and hopes that things might start to click into place.

It really is all about the questions asked. Since Ro's responses are limited to yes and no, he can't just explain. Hitoshi needs to hit the

nail on the head to get somewhere. If he asks a shitty question, Ro gives a shitty answer. It's all one big guessing game.

Still, they make progress. Just... very slowly.

But progress is progress.

Which leads him to the entrance of the *hospital*.

Standing, staring up at the sliding glass doors with a frown on his lips. It's weird to be here—even weirder to be here alone, but Ro had suggested them come here—or, Hitoshi had asked if he should find his uncle at the hospital, which had led to a very unhelpful yes-no.

That lead to Hitoshi asking if he should find his uncle: No. Then to asking if he should go to the *hospital*: Yes.

He's really not sure why he's here, but he trusts the ghost. He's got to have something planned, right? He has to know something Hitoshi doesn't, and just not know how to say it.

...right?

"Listen, Ro, you'd better lead me around here, because if someone at reception asks why I'm here, I'll probably get kicked out, since I don't even know why I'm really here," Hitoshi mutters under his breath, followed by the overhead doorway light faintly flickering. "That, or I'll be admitted to the psych ward or something for *following lights* and *talking to myself*..."

The light flickers quick, and Hitoshi gets the feeling the ghost is telling him to *suck it up*.

At least Ro was still around.

"Hey, also keep me away from my uncles too, if you would. If they find me, I'm screwed."

The light flickers again, almost mockingly. He should've known Ro would have an attitude after playing games with him.

Hitoshi sees the next light in the line, just inside the door flickering invitingly, and he knows it's Ro trying to prompt him on. He feels ridiculous as he steps through the door and watches as the light flicker in a straight line leading down a hallway, the opposite direction from the receptionist. Good.

Hitoshi bites his lip as he looks around himself to see if anyone else is around, or noticing the flickering lights, but he’s alone. He lets out a sigh, “well... here goes nothing.”

He can just hope that Ro has a plan here.

Chapter End Notes

You've made it to the end of another chapter! I hope you liked it! The tension was high with this chapter.

I don't know why, but I really like protective Nezu, so sorry if that bled into the chapter— I just think it's so cute. He's so chaotic, and sly, but I like to believe he's a good principal and boss. Also, sorry if this one feels like a filler chapter, I wanted to actually have the police and Pros work for information since as far as I remember (and I could be wrong) they gloss over where they got the information about the League of Villain's bar? I just figured vigilantes would be a good source of intel.

Anyways! Like always, I hope you liked this! Comments are very greatly appreciated, and I always love to see the kudos and bookmark numbers going up too :) Hopefully I'll get the next chapter out soon! Thanks so much for reading!

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

> Welcome back!
>
> Probably not much canon dialogue here because I didn't want to rewatch, so I'm going off my own memory and the Wiki of what goes down and adding a little bit of spice because I can. Hopefully it all comes together well!
>
> Anyways, not much to say about this chapter, so, please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hitoshi frowns to himself as he follows the flickering lights.

Truth be told, the follow the light idea that they'd come up with, which at the time had seemed like a good idea in theory (the one that was really their *only* idea actually, considering how limited *communication* was with the *afterlife* was when the ghost-seeing and-speaking-to teenager was MIA), it turned out to be harder than Hitoshi had thought it would've been walking into the hospital.

The hospital is huge— which he probably should've expected, but *hadn't*— is probably the first note Hitoshi would make. It's huge, and there's dead ends, and lots of rooms and it's very easy to get lost if you don't know exactly where you're going.

And if Hitoshi didn't know any better, he might think the ghost he's following might've gotten a little lost too in the middle there. He's certain they did a full loop of the third floor *twice*, before being led back to the elevator where the overhead light fluttered promptingly, almost urging Hitoshi back into the elevator with haste.

Hitoshi had never thought lights could appear *sheepish*, but they certainly had when he'd shot the elevator light an annoyed look upwards after pressing the fourth-floor button. He's never seen a light shutter and dim like that light had, so he assumes it's a muted apology from the ghost.

It honestly takes a while to make his way through the hospital.

Not only does progress stop completely as he sharply looks away from any flickering lights when anyone; a nurse, doctor, orderly or visitor

turns a corner or passes by, but the lights, as if sensing Hitoshi's hesitance to be caught gawking at a flickering light, abruptly returns to full brightness whenever anyone appears.

And that, if you can imagine, in a busy hospital, is near constantly happening.

Then there's the fact that the ghost can't convey which floor they're supposed to be on.

Hitoshi had stood for a good minute and a half when he'd first gotten into the elevator for the first time, waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened.

The light overhead had flickered ominously, slowly, but none of the floor numbers had lit up like they'd been pressed. He'd stood like an idiot in a closed, unmoving elevator and hadn't touched anything while waiting for a *ghost* to do it for him. For the person leading him, the one with actual knowledge, the one *without* an actual hand or physical body, to press the button.

For the second time in such a short amount of time, Hitoshi feels like an idiot.

Hitoshi wonders if that's a limitation of Ro's now.

Izuku had said something about being the ghost's energy source, hadn't he? Was Izuku's absence limiting Ro's abilities? The ghost hadn't thought he'd be able to hold a game console controller, and when Hitoshi had asked about using a pencil and a sheet of paper, the ghost had also vetoed that—which doesn't make sense, considering a pencil isn't really much more than a stick of pocky—

But... now's not the time to be thinking about that.

It had taken an *embarrassingly* long time to realize that he should probably do something if the ghost wasn't, so, he'd pressed the button for the next floor since there was no other tell as to which floor they were supposed to be on.

Which then started their adventure of walking the entirety of each floor until arriving back at the elevator, which Hitoshi took as a cue to move to the next floor.

That process continued until they finally arrived on the fourth floor, which is when the lights started flickering hurriedly, almost *excitedly*.

Hitoshi takes that to mean they'd finally found the right floor for whatever Ro was trying to show him.

Still, he follows cautiously after the flickering line of overhead lights.

He really has no idea where he'd being led—not even the slightest. He'd tried asking additional questions before throwing in the towel when the ghost hadn't really answered, but he really does assume Ro has a plan here.

Or, he really, really hopes he does.

And that it doesn't involve either of his uncles, because he very much would be screwed if uncle Sho even caught wind of the news Hitoshi was in the hospital after a villain attack he had literally zero-part in.

Hitoshi knows he's arrived at the correct location when the flickering light makes an abrupt jump from right in front of him, to skipping over three lights in the middle before blinking slowly, almost like it wasn't blinking at all, outside a hospital room.

He doesn't know what he'd been expecting, but it certainly isn't to glance into a room filled with Izuku's classmates. Of Shota's students. The entirety of 1-A stands tensely around a bed, low murmurs of tense and frustrated voices filling the room.

Hitoshi peeks in through the doorway, taking care to keep himself hidden to the best of his abilities while also being able to look in. The light in the hospital room blinks once in invitation which none of the 1-A kids seem to notice. Hitoshi glares at the light but it doesn't draw any more attention to itself.

Hitoshi, for a brief moment, thinks about turning on his heels and leaving.

He doesn't know how he'd even explain his presence to a group of his uncle's students—he doesn't know most of these kids. Hardly knows the ones Izuku had suckered him into spending lunch with. And he doesn't know what Ro *wants* him to do with 1-A.

He wants to leave, but he knows he can't. He can't do that to Izuku—they're friends. Cousins. He'll do anything he can to help his friend, and well, he literally can't leave—

"Shinsou?"

Hitoshi knows the voice of Iida Tenya.

They'd been friends of relation since as far back as Hitoshi can remember. They'd used to have dumb playdates since they'd both been in diapers— despite the fact that his uncle and Iida's older brother hung out and often times arranged for the two of them to tag along for socialization purposes, they hadn't really stayed friends.

Iida's family was wealthy and there had always been an upbringing rift between them. Not that he doesn't not like the guy or anything, they're just from different worlds and things like school and where they live, how they live got in the way growing up. Not to mention their vastly different personalities that had them butting heads more often than not.

Tenya went to fancy private schools, and Hitoshi suffered through public school because it's not like they were wealthy or anything. After they both got their Quirks, and started school, they stopped seeing each other as much—it's not like Eraserhead and Ingenium, two busy debuting Pro Heroes, had the time to arrange playdates, so after that, they only really saw each other at gatherings and holidays.

But still, as his name is called tightly by Tenya, and eyes, literally *every* eye in the room jerks to look at him as Tenya's call of his name rings loudly through the near instant silence, he knows he can't bolt.

Well, he could, probably, but he won't.

"Iida," Hitoshi greets tensely in reply, swallowing down his nerve as he fully steps into the doorway. "Uraraka, Asui, Todoroki," he greets those he knows and waves sheepishly at those remaining, "um, hey."

There's a bit of an uncomfortable silence as everyone just stares at each other—or, more fitting would be Hitoshi glances awkwardly around the room, and they all glare at *him*. Well, glare isn't quite right, but it's not *wrong* either.

Iida, stepping forwards, seemingly taking control of his peers and the situation, crosses his arms over his chest and frowns thoughtfully, "what are you doing here, Shinsou?"

"What do you think I'm doing here?" Shinsou huffs back, arms crossing over his chest to match Iida. He hopes it comes off as calm and indifferent, but the tension grates at his nerves, and he'd just quite literally been dropped into a room of 1-A kids: thanks for that, Ro. There probably could've been some way to offer a warning or

something: who'd've thought the ghost could be an asshole.

“Who is this?” A spiky red-haired teen asks, eyes narrowed accusingly.

“This is Shinsou Hitoshi,” Asui introduces calmly, “he’s Midoriya-kun's friend from General Education, kero.”

“He’s the one who battled Deku during the Sports Festival, the match before Deku and Todoroki-kun’s match,” Uraraka adds easily, “he’s been having lunch with us recently, right, Iida?”

Hitoshi rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck—he'd never liked it when people talked about him while he was right there, but he’s glad they’re answering. Probably better that 1-A students explain who he is to other 1-A students. Easier to believe he’s an ally that way.

“That’s true,” Iida offers slowly, some of the tension easing from his shoulders. “That doesn’t explain why you’re here right now, Shinsou —”

“I know what happened,” Hitoshi’s interrupts coolly, letting his features settle in a way he hopes doesn’t come off as nervous as he narrows his eyes. There’s no point beating around the bush. He knows, so they don’t have to sensor themselves. He’s in on the secret.

“And how do you know that?” the student with the tape dispenser elbows asks with a suspicious glare. “How do you know something happened, huh?”

And he... he does not have an answer for that. Not a believable one, at least.

‘I followed a ghost?’

‘My uncles, your two Senseis, called my mother, Aizawa’s sister, to inform her that Izuku, Aizawa’s foster kid and your classmate, who is technically, sorta, my cousin by relation, had been kidnapped?’

He wants them to trust him. He wants to be let in on this meeting of the minds, or whatever it is the 1-A kids get up to, and he knows, without a doubt, that if he says either of those things, he’ll probably get security called on him—or worse, uncle Shota.

He’s probably stammering like a fool, because the longer he sits and thinks about it, the more insane any of his responses sound. That’s what he gets for blindly following a ghost, he supposes. He’ll make

sure to tell Izuku that his ghost friend is a cunning asshole when he next sees him.

“Shinsou has a family member who’s close to Midoriya’s guardians,” Iida says, snapping Hitoshi from his thoughts. Hitoshi can just shoot the other teen a thankful look. Iida turns away sharply when he notices, like he feels bad for providing an excuse to his peers, “but still, that doesn’t explain why you’re here, Shinsou.”

“I want to help,” Hitoshi musters up all of his courage and steps more into the room. He tries to hold himself like he belongs there, but he’s not sure it really works, “Izuku is my friend— one of my *best* friends— and there has to be something I can do to help him. I know without a doubt he’d run through hell for me—for any of us— and I’ll do the same for him. Please, *please*, tell me you guys have a plan.”

“Why would we even tell you if we did have a plan? You’re not even in heroics,” the tiny purple-ball-haired one spits with a glare, and Hitoshi swallows down the burning rage that wants to consume him.

It would be so easy to punt kick that little bastard into the ceiling, but he shows some restraint.

Until the idiot just doesn’t know when to quit: “A little useless here, aren’t ya?”

“And who the hell’re you?” Hitoshi snaps snidely, knowing the asshole will take the bait.

“Listen here yo—” the growl is cut off as his eyes glaze over. Satisfaction settles in Hitoshi’s stomach as he gives the teen under his Quirk’s effect an unsatisfied onceover. It didn’t take much to figure out who this kid is. This must be the one he hears about through the rumor mill around school. Mineta. Gross.

Even Izuku doesn’t have much nice to say about the kid—and Izuku is practically *sunshine*.

“Walk out that door,” Hitoshi orders stiffly, distasteful gaze not straying from the other teen, “and walk two-hundred laps around this wing of the hospital. Don’t bother anyone. Don’t draw attention to yourself, just walk quietly. Don’t come back until you’re finished, and when you do return, say nothing until this conversation is *finished*.”

Like clockwork, the tiny bastard slips through the mob of his classmates and walks right out the door after Hitoshi steps out of his

way. Good riddance. Hitoshi watches him leave with a glare before turning back to the remainder of 1-A.

They're all staring.

He blinks back at them.

"Shinsou, you know you're not supposed to use your Quirk without a license," Iida huffs out like it's a losing battle—and it is. It's not the first time he's said that to Hitoshi and it won't be the last. Iida had always had a stick up his ass, squawking about illegal Quirk usage all the time when they were little and Hitoshi's control still wavered. He'd learned to ignore it—especially when Iida Tensei had patted him on the shoulder and told him not to take Tenya's stickler nature to heart. "Honestly, I have no idea how you're related to your uncle."

"Are you saying you *like* his company?" Hitoshi cocks an eyebrow, glancing around the room. The girls duck their heads and most of the boys look away guiltily. No one corrects him. "There're worse things I could've done then send him for laps, he's just getting some exercise. Now can we get back to the topic of my missing best friend?"

"How do you... know we have anything planned?" the student with the tail asks slowly, "this is something best left to the teachers, police and Pros, isn't it? We should stay out of it."

For a second, Hitoshi's brain buffers. Did... did he hear that right?

"How can you just sit back and not want to help?" Hitoshi knows his eyebrows have furrowed. He's confused. Astounded, really. These are 1-A students, and their classmate has gone missing. They're just going to sit back and wait for them to be found.

"It's not that we don't *want* to help, kero," Asui replies softly, tongue peeking out of the corner of her mouth. She frowns at Hitoshi when he just narrows his eyes at her. Asui wilts slightly under Hitoshi's storming gaze as she tries to figure out how to continue—how to explain how they *want* to help, but *won't*.

"Tsu's right," Uraraka gives a little nod from where she's sitting on the edge of the hospital bed. Hitoshi looks past the gravity-Quirked girl and to the head of the bed where a thoughtful Yaoyorozu sits. He faintly remembers Yaoyorozu. He'd only met her in passing just recently when she'd come to ask Izuku a question over lunch.

She'd seemed nice.

His gaze crawls back to Uraraka when she pipes up again, “I’m just as worried about Deku as you are, Shinsou-kun, but there really isn’t much we can do to help. We’re just students.”

“So let me get this straight, you want to help,” Hitoshi narrows his eyes as his arms lace over his chest, “but you won’t? Because… because *what*? You’re just students? Because the Pros will handle it? Because they might be *mad* that you’re doing what Heroes are supposed to do? I thought you guys were supposed to *be* the Heroes? Isn’t that what we’re all trying to do here?”

Hitoshi pauses, glaring at each and every face in the room.

Some glare back, while others just look annoyed or nervous, and, he gets it; he’s prickly on the best of days and more so when he’s *stressed*. And he knows it’s probably not right that he’s firing shots at them after what he can only imagine was a traumatic night, but at the same time, he’s been holding these kids up on a pedestal that they clearly don’t deserve to be on if this is what 1-A truly is.

This wasn’t what he’d expected 1-A kids to be like, not according to Izuku’s raving mutters of 1-A, at least. Standing before these kids, Hitoshi doesn’t see what Izuku does. He’s not sure he’ll ever see what Izuku sees, because this, this first impression, is what Hitoshi will remember.

This isn’t a group of Heroes-in-training who will stop at nothing to rescue their friends.

“Y’know,” Hitoshi offers icily when none of them say a thing, “I worked my ass off to try and get into your class. I fought tooth and nail at the Sports Festival to try and transfer in because you’re supposed to be the best of the best. I want to *help* people. I want to be a *Hero*, but I’m not sure I want to be in your class anymore if this is what you do when your classmate has been kidnapped. When he needs you; when he *needs help* and you’re all just sitting around waiting for someone else to take care of it.”

“Shinsou,” Iida scolds, glaring daggers at the purple haired teen.

And maybe he’s being too hard on them.

He probably is.

He really does empathize. He gets it; their situation—they’re probably scared, and hurt and they are still all students after all. He imagines

they're worried too. They've known Izuku longer, even if Hitoshi has gotten closer.

On one hand, they're probably doing the right thing—being reasonable. Thinking things through and being smart about it. They're looking at this and seeing danger. Seeing trouble for themselves if they get caught. They're being smart.

But they aren't being good friends.

He knows his uncle would prefer they stay put. Would prefer to know that they stay safe, and Hitoshi knows that. That's the one thing he has over 1-A, he's known Aizawa Shota his literal entire life. He knows what his uncle would want, and it's probably not this.

He knows that his uncle is going to lose his Goddamned mind when he gets wind of this, but Hitoshi can't find it in himself to care because it's *Izuku*.

It's Izuku that's missing, and if Hitoshi knows anything about the green-haired teen, it's that Izuku would stop at nothing when it comes to protecting his friends.

And since Izuku's not here to light a fire under his classmates' asses in his positive '*go get'em*' way, Hitoshi will have to do it himself. Even if doing it himself means calling them all out and potentially making enemies out of potential future classmates.

There's a moment of silence, and Hitoshi just stews under it. The silence speaks volumes.

"Purple bro's right!" the red-head huffs in annoyance, and it's not what Hitoshi expects in the slightest, "that's what I've been saying! They need our help. They're our classmates—our *friends*— we can't just sit around and do nothing! You guys know just as well as I do that if Midoriya was here, he'd be stopping at nothing to get Bakugou back. But he's not, because he's the *manliest* of us all and rushed that void to try and get Baku-bro back."

He pauses, eyeing his classmates with a straight expression, "can any of us say the same?"

Bakugou was gone as well? That's a tiny detail his mother either didn't hear about, or didn't think Hitoshi needed to hear about. It doesn't really change anything though—if they're going for Izuku, might as well bring back the hot-head too.

“We should take a page out of Midoriya’s book,” the red-head continues, “because the way I’m lookin’ at it, he’s the only one who really went Plus Ultra out there. He’s the only one who ran head first into that portal to rescue Bakugou.”

“Yeah… I don’t know, man,” the golden-haired teen with the jagged black lightning bolt across his fringe shrugs awkwardly. “It just… doesn’t seem like a very good idea. We *are* just students… And Aizawa-Sensei would be pissed if we did anything. Do you not remember him telling us to stay put?”

“Exactly,” Iida snuffs, “we had permission to use our training and combat at the time. That offer has long since been revoked. It’s illegal to use our Quirks—Sensei will already probably be getting into trouble for even giving us permission during the attack.”

“Oui,” the blonde boy in the fancy velvety looking shirt nods, “we shouldn’t do anything that will get ourselves or our Sensei into trouble. The Pros and police will handle our missing classmates, we should leave this to them, no?”

“I agree,” a deep voice adds quietly. Hitoshi glances over at the bird-headed boy, “it’s just not worth the risk of endangering more of us. I speak solely for myself when I say this, but I know my performance left much to be desired during the attack. I need to work harder with my Quirk, and I know I’m not ready to fight the villains again yet. They were stronger than us. Smarter. We’re lucky to have made it out of that attack with our lives.”

A wave of mumbled agreements falls over the room, and Hitoshi can’t help but feel sick.

This isn’t working…

“We can help them though,” the red-head urges desperately. “You guys can’t seriously be down to just sit and wait—we're Hero course students!”

“Midoriya would stop at nothing to save any of us if the roles were reversed.”

Hitoshi whips around to where Todoroki is standing at the foot of Yaoyorozu's bed, hands tucked in the pockets of his sweatpants. He’d been quiet up until now, quiet and hidden in the mess of his peers, so Hitoshi hadn’t even noticed him.

Hitoshi frowns thoughtfully at the dual-haired teen who's scanning his peers' faces.

Though Todoroki had been there when he'd joined Izuku and his friends for lunch those couple times, he hadn't really heard Todoroki speak or express an opinion much more than nods or shakes of his head. He's very quiet and withdrawn, as far as Hitoshi had noticed, so this is a bit of a surprise.

The dual-haired teen glances around the room with a furrowed brow, before his gaze settles on Iida and his mouth presses into a flat line. There's not really annoyance in Todoroki's expression, just maybe a bit of disappointment as the two of them glare back and forth silently.

The red- and white-haired teen draws his gaze away after a second and continues on effortlessly, "Midoriya has proven time and time again that he's got our backs. He rushed the villains to try and rescue Bakugou when none of us did to that extent, even though he was badly injured. He's helped us all with our Quirks. He's been there to cover our asses. He's jumped at every opportunity to help us—" a pointed look at Iida that Hitoshi can't even pretend to understand, because everyone else (besides Iida) looks just as confused. "He's had our backs, so why don't we have his?"

"That's not fair, Todoroki-kun," Uraraka whispers. "Deku wouldn't just run blindly into danger like this."

Hitoshi narrows his eyes at the girl, just barely managing to keep the snappish '*have you even met him?*' to himself. Izuku one-hundred percent would charge into any fight blindly if it meant protecting someone.

"This is ridiculous," Iida huffs, "I want our classmates home just as much as anyone, but I cannot condone blatant rule breaking like this. I won't be a part of it, and neither should any of us. Aizawa-Sensei is doing everything he can, and I'm sure there are handfuls of other Pros involved as well. We'd be nothing but nuisances getting in the way and interrupting their work."

"But we'd be helping our friends!" the red-head argues in frustration.

"We can't keep arguing like this, kero," Asui mumbles just loud enough for the group to hear, "we all need to keep a level head, like Aizawa-Sensei taught us. Running into this is a bad idea. Iida is right. We can't think with our emotions. We're not prepared for this. Please think this through, Kirishima-kun, Todoroki-kun, if you do this, you'd

be no different than the villains themselves."

A stunned silence settles over the room.

Hitoshi doesn't need to say anything to know that they'd already made up their minds. Arguing further would be a waste. Hanging around when it's pointless is just waiting to be found by his uncles.

Still, Hitoshi can't help but let the swirl of anger in his stomach twist.

"So that's it then, huh?" Hitoshi scowls around at Izuku's classmates, hardly even seeing their faces through his own bristling anger. "What's the point of becoming a Hero if you won't *be* one when it really counts?"

And with that, he turns on his heels and walks out of the room. There's nothing else to be said.

Just as he leaves, a doctor steps through the threshold of the room, and he sort of hears the students being dismissed. Dozens of footsteps promptly trail out after him, but he just quickens his pace, not sure he'd be able to see any of them without getting irrationally angry.

Hitoshi tugs at his own hair as he walks, gnawing on his bottom lip.

He stalks away from the hospital room, expression twisted in a scowl of defeat.

God.

That was a waste of time.

The light overhead flickers two blinks and Hitoshi just glares upwards for a second without pausing in his movements, "y'know, this is your fault. I shouldn't even be here."

"Who's fault?"

Hitoshi swirls around, coming face to face with the red-head 1-A student—Kirishima if he had to hazard a guess. Asui had addressed Todoroki and Kirishima—the only two fighting for a rescue mission instead of against.

The other teen looks sheepish as he looks around Hitoshi to try and spot whoever the purple-haired teen had been speaking to, not that there's anyone to see. Hitoshi scrunches up his nose and shoot the unwavering overhead light fixture a glare.

Hitoshi schools his features as realizes with a start that this is one of the kids he'd just ripped into. Not directly, but as a whole. Honestly, after how he'd acted in there, a tiny part of him is expecting to be punched—he hadn't exactly left the room on a positive note. So, he eyes the kid over his nose and leans to glance around him to see if anymore 1-A kids are making their way over, but it appears they're alone.

"What?" Hitoshi balks when his mind finally catches up to the question he'd been asked, "oh, uh, nothing. Just. Y'know. Venting..."

"Uh, rigghht," Kirishima furrows his brow before shaking his head. His expression hardens and Hitoshi wrinkles his nose as the 1-A kid leans close and continues, "it doesn't matter right now anyways. Did... did you mean it?"

"Did I mean *what*?" Hitoshi isn't sure he keeps the exhausted exasperation from his voice as he answers, but it doesn't seem to deter Kirishima at all.

The other teen just puffs out his chest and narrows his eyes, and Hitoshi really feels like there will be a wrong way to answer his following question that very well may get him punched, "what you said in there—when you were talking about going to rescue Bakugou and Midoriya. Were you serious about that? About... about being involved?"

Hitoshi narrows his eyes in challenge, "I wouldn't be here if I wasn't. Trust me, there's a lot riding on this and if I get caught, I'm sure I'll either be throttled by my parents and uncles, or I'll spend the rest of my life in the confines of my bedroom in the grounding of a lifetime. Maybe even both depending on how this goes."

Kirishima stares into Hitoshi's eyes searching—it feels like he's literally searching Hitoshi's soul and it's one of the most unpleasant things Hitoshi's ever been through, but he doesn't risk looking away.

Finally, after what feels life forever, the red-head blinks and easily grabs both of Hitoshi's shoulders in a tight, serious grip, "we have a plan."

And that's all Hitoshi needs to hear.

Shota had been right to heed Nezu's warning he realizes as he sits at a conference table with Nezu himself and Vlad King on either side of

him. He'd heeded it, technically, but he wishes now he maybe had really taken the warning to heart.

Maybe if he actually slept instead of just resting his eyes in the presence of his husband before sitting up and getting back to work attempting to find his kids, he wouldn't feel as awful as he does.

He already has a headache and he's sure it's not about to leave any time soon. It's not even noon, and yet his head pounds and his thoughts muddle together in that way he hates. The burning behind his eyes is intense, and he's sure when he finally lets his body rest, he'll have one hell of a migraine.

He's sure it'll get worse from here on out, until his kids are home safe and sound—it always does when he's in a dour mood, and he over uses his Quirk and doesn't get enough sleep. Plus there's the fact that he's being forced into a monkey suit with slicked back hair curtesy of Hizashi had annoyed him even more.

He hates dressing up, and to be doing it now— to look presentable for people he honestly couldn't give two shits about when two of his students are missing, when *Izuku is missing*, pisses him off.

It's the most presentable he's looked since his wedding day, and it sucks he's doing it for show. Playing Nezu's little publicity game to please the public and get them off of Yuuei's ass. Like they don't have better things to be doing then sitting around playing dress-up and getting asked illogical questions about what happened instead of trying to fix it.

God, he hates limelight stuff. This is a waste of time—

…

Okay.

Maybe Nezu had been right yesterday when he'd made that comment about not trusting Shota to be able to hold a civil conversation for long. He's still not the best candidate, but he knows if Nezu could get away with Shota not being here, he would—as much as the rodent likes to watch human-kind suffer, that sadistic rat that he is, he knows Nezu has some class and prides himself on Yuuei's image, which is taking quite the hit right now.

Shota is arguably the least ideal person to have here, but somehow his name had been leaked as the teaching Pro, along with Vlad, so there's

literally no way to weasel out of it without causing a stir that'll likely drag Yuuei's name through the mud again.

'*Breaking News: Pro Hero teacher refuses to accept responsibility for negligence after two students go missing on a school trip! What kinds of people are teaching our children—is Yuuei High School really safe?*'

God, he can see the headlines now. Each more ridiculous then the last, as the media tends to do. Any headline that'll get clicks and attention, even if it's obscenely fake and obviously reaching.

Hence why he's suffering through this without much complaint to his boss.

Sitting here, the center of attention, not just any attention, but the *media's* attention, reminds Shota why he chose Underground Heroics in the first place. He's ready for it to be over before he even steps out of the car Nezu had sent to the hospital to pick him and Vlad up.

He probably should've taken more down time then he had, as his head pounds, and his eyes burn.

He so badly wants to shut his eyes and sleep, but even if he could, he knows he'd never be able to. Every time he shuts his eyes, all he sees is Izuku's busted up arms, broken arms that Shota had let him walk away with, and his bruised face, and then he sees Shigaraki's hand settled on the teen's face just like Shigaraki's hand had gripped his own elbow.

He can only watch helplessly, *desperately*, as Shigaraki makes five points of contact and Izuku starts to crumble away until—

He swallows down the fear, squeezing his eyes shut as he takes a breath.

Settled at a table in front of dozens of reporters and multiple cameras is the last place one should be having a panic attack. He needs to get himself together. Last thing then need is for the public to get some crazy idea that he's incompetent or something, simply because he's stressed and panicking and this is not helping with literally *anything*.

It takes a second, but he managed to force himself back to now. Focuses on the loud demand for answers and shouted accusations. Focuses on Nezu's calming words as he tries to talk down what Shota would only call a *mob* of reporters. Nezu has always had a way with words, and Shota is so incredibly glad for that now as he tries not to

glare out at the crowd of squawking vultures.

He's tired, and annoyed, and worried and anxious and honestly feels like throwing up, but the media vultures carry on with their demanding questions and uneducated accusations. They're here demanding things when they don't know what happened. They don't know what went down, and how Shota, and Vlad and the Pussycats had given their all to keep those kids safe.

How they still *failed*, because the League chose to attack when they were all separated, when the students were broken off into groups instead of as a whole—when the Pros were by themselves with small groups of kids. They attacked when they were at their weakest.

How despite their efforts, two students, two *kids*, had been taken—and they have to live with that, even without reporters shoving it in their faces. For God's sake, he knows they failed. He's well aware.

The apology goes well, more or less. It doesn't appear to satisfy most of the crowd, but at the same time, they'll probably get some credit for hosting this and providing what little information they can.

Shota tries not to look at them as the shouts get angrier and more vicious.

Nezu works tirelessly to calm them down and provide careful, thought-out answers to their questions.

Nezu talks of taking strong measures to ensure student safety on campus, and Shota's a little curious what his boss has in mind, since Nezu doesn't expand on that. Nezu does, however, talk of strengthening their security measures and re-examining Yuuei's crime prevention system, which definitely should've been done earlier. It really was time to pull their heads out of their asses—these threats and attacks aren't one-time things. They aren't going to stop, apparently.

Still, they don't seem impressed.

They're angry. Enraged. Demanding more than they can offer at this time, and genuinely questioning the student's safety at school. Questioning the teacher's ability to keep their kids safe like Shota and Vlad's mistakes reflect on the *entire* staff.

Then, of course, it only makes sense that Shota is singled out by one journalist with venomous eyes and an accusing tone.

It does makes sense; he'd been the one to give the order for the kids to use their Quirks illegally. He's well aware that's a controversial decision, and had known at the time as well.

It's no secret he'd told his kids to use their Quirks—honestly, he'd much rather backlash now then having to face any of his students losing their lives. It's the most logical solution—even thinking back now, after the majority of the storm has passed and he's calmed and thinking clearly.

He knows he'd do it all again in a heartbeat if it meant his students survived.

If he could go back and change things about that night, he would, definitely, but the one thing he wouldn't change is giving them permission to protect themselves and each other.

He strongly believes there was no casualties because they protected themselves.

Shota's so glad they did.

He honestly doesn't remember what he says when his patience finally snaps a little as the insistent journalist doesn't let up—he's caught up in defending his two students. The journalist has no right to turn this around on Bakugou, who is a *missing child*. He has no right to doubt the child in question due to past instances.

His irritation might show faintly, but he's quick to replace it was a calm, almost apologetic air. He thinks he does a good enough job keeping his cool while still getting his message across.

His defense of these students who the media has no right to pretend they know.

His defense of Bakugou's character, which these people are seeing as nothing more than explosive and hotheaded when he's so much more, temper aside. He knows Bakugou has some flaws that Shota will be working hard to help the kid overcome but that doesn't mean he's a *villain*.

The audacity of this journalist has Shota's hands curling into fists.

He won't try to defend himself here; he knows he's in the wrong, he knows he could've done better. *He knows*. Defending himself would be illogical, really, when he's well aware there are things he could've

done differently. Choices he could've made that would've changed this outcome.

So, no, he won't defend himself against them, but he sure as hell will defend his students.

Christ, he *hates* the media.

Information on the League comes in just after Shota has arrived back at the hospital. His students are mostly in the process of getting released, and parents and guardians have been picking them up from Hizashi, who promised to hang around while Shota was dragged away.

He'd been beyond glad to return to the hospital to his husband's waiting arms, a tv in one of the conference rooms they'd all but taken over at Nezu's chipper insistence turned onto what Shota can only assume was one of the many channels airing the press conference.

The sad look of sympathy is enough for Shota to know Hizashi, like the rest if Japan, had tuned in. And he'd watched the whole thing, if the familiar glow of anger in his eyes is anything to go off.

When they finally pull away from the tender hug, Hizashi gestures with a nod of his head to a stack of clothes on the table, and Shota decides then that he's never been more in love with this man then he is right now. Hizashi is a Godsend, and nothing will ever change his mind.

His sits at the table after he's dressed in dark sweatpants and dark blue sweatshirt (one that he's almost positive came from Hizashi's side of the closet), letting his head drop onto the tabletop with a thump.

He doesn't even get to rest for a couple minutes before his phone is ringing, and he's snapping to attention as he fumbles to answer the call.

It's an anonymous tip called in to the special police line Tsukauchi set up.

Shota had sent out brief descriptions of the villains they came into contact with who had managed to get away. Amongst them, had been the scarred-villain who Shota had fought outside the lodge.

The anonymous tip had been nothing but a report of someone seeing a

person of that description entering a bar in a sleazier part of Kamino.

Still, it's more than they expected to end up getting, and Shota is beyond grateful.

He's not invited to the meeting considering that Yuuei teachers are still a hot topic when it comes to media coverage, but is assured that high-ranking Pros have made it their mission to get the students back —Shota has no doubt the All Might is among them.

As much as he thinks Yagi lacks when it comes to teaching and that he's a bit out of his depth when it comes to interacting with students, he knows the man is a good Pro Hero, and he knows he has a soft spot for Izuku as well. It makes him feel a little bit better about the fact he and Hizashi are finally being benched in the rescue mission when he knows All Might will be there.

Shota and Hizashi wait at the hospital even if most of the student have been discharged.

Vlad still has some students unconscious, and a few of Shota's own kids will be getting discharged later in the day. Plus, it can't hurt to be here when Izuku and Bakugou are brought in. It'll save time. Logical.

Still, Shota can't help but grumble about how this is the absolute worst part of being a Pro Hero.

Knowing things are in motion and not being able to assist.

Hizashi is in silent agreement as he matches Shota's slumped, almost reclined position in his office chair, somehow managing to lean against Shota while balanced vicariously in the office chair matching Shota's own.

The dark-haired man heaves a sigh as he lets his head settle against Hizashi's, which is resting on his shoulder, as he catches Hizashi's hand where it rests on his thigh and interlaces their fingers together. Hizashi doesn't say anything, but he does give a squeeze back.

Sitting and waiting is definitely the worst.

Oboro tucks close enough to Hitoshi to be a part of the conversation, but keeps enough distance to not accidentally touch the kid. They're stood outside the hospital waiting for Yaoyorozu to finish being discharged so they can leave.

Hitoshi is half hiding behind a bush, as it's fairly common knowledge that both Shota and Hizashi have been hanging around the hospital. Hitoshi would definitely be dead if either caught him, and then their whole plan would fall to pieces.

And that can't happen.

Not when they're so close now.

He'd known, when he started flickering the lights in Izuku's bedroom in reply to Hitoshi's questions, that there was a very good chance that this would fail.

But it *hadn't*.

Sure, there were some bumps along the way, but he's somehow managed to drag the kid to where the 1-A students were talking.

He'd heard by accident, really.

The plan that some of the students were brewing up.

Or, the beginnings of one, at least.

Shota had been one of the first to hear when Yaoyorozu had woken up. As expected, he'd been out of his seat and beelining down the hall. Oboro had followed after his school friend and settled in the doorway as Shota gave the girl a worried scan before he'd offered her a tiny, yet relieved, smile.

Shota had sat in the chair at her bedside for a little while, talking softly to her.

It was seeing this, interactions like this between Shota and the children he teaches, or even just children in general, that had always made Oboro think he'd make a great teacher—and he was right. There's something so soft about how he manipulates his aura from hard-ass, strict and occasionally terrifying teacher to softspoken and calming like now.

She'd woken bleary eyed and confused, a frown tugging at her lips as she gave her teacher a onceover before her expression melted away to a carefully constructed blankness.

She remembered, clearly.

When she'd woken up, it had been roughly fifteen hours since the

attack on the camp. Since Izuku and Bakugou had been taken. Oboro himself had been trying to keep himself busy. He'd spent most of his time with Hitoshi, but he jumped around between his school friends too.

He'd spent the morning with Hitoshi though, heart pounding hopefully in his chest as he trailed after the purple-haired teen who was making his way to the apartment.

It was only when Hitoshi was on the bus heading in the right direction that Oboro took the time to step away to check on his friends again—and it happened to be just around that time the Yaoyorozu woke.

Shota didn't stick around long in the teen's room when he made sure she was okay, but Oboro did. In the most not creepy way possible. His interest had been piqued as she waits for Shota to leave before shuffling around and he couldn't help but chase the curiosity and stick around.

He stepped into the room further and tucked himself into a corner as he watched her shuffle through her belongings until she pulled out some sort of technology thing. He really has no idea what it is—it looks a little outdated to be a phone, and if it is, it's one Oboro has never seen in all his years: both alive and just hanging around.

And he only got more curious when she just stared down at it thoughtfully, thumbing over a blinking dot on the screen. He thought about getting closer, but didn't want to risk getting to close.

Oboro didn't get an answer to his internal questions until some of Izuku's classmates filtered into the room to see her.

A tracker.

That clever, clever girl had put a *tracker* on a Nomu.

There was *hope*.

Oboro didn't stick around long after that, blinking himself into Izuku's room where a suspicious Hitoshi squints up at the ceiling. Oboro hopes he hadn't been waiting long, but he's quick to fiddle around with the light bulb before Hitoshi leaves in huff at lack of ghostly interference.

It had been a lot of work to talk to Hitoshi without Izuku.

Oboro desperately wished he had some kind of control, that he could touch things still, but every time he tried, he went right through. It was the most frustrating thing. He'd been used to touching things with Izuku's help, and to suddenly have it stripped away, he honestly feels like when he'd first realized he was a ghost.

Still, by some miracle, they make progress.

Oboro manages to lead the teenager to the hospital, and through the hospital with only a couple small hiccups. He's beyond relieved to find the 1-A kids all still gathered in Yaoyorozu's room like when he'd popped in while Hitoshi had been in the elevator.

He really does wish he could've warned Hitoshi, but, well, he's a ghost.

Can't give someone a heads up when all you can do is flicker a light. And, to be honest, he only feels a little bit bad about throwing the teen the 1-A. They'll probably been classmates soon, anyways, if Shota doesn't kill Hitoshi for this when he finds out. And Hitoshi will have to get through Yua too, and she's *scarier*.

The chat doesn't go as well as planned—Oboro is a little surprised to see so many 1-A kids willing to stay back and let the professionals handle the situation. Shota will probably be ecstatic they have some common sense, but Oboro really wasn't expecting that twist.

Oboro's attention flicks back and forth like he's watching a tennis ball fly over a net when it comes to 1-A bickering. He can just sit on the edge of his seat as he waits for a verdict.

He wants to cry when they finally come to a conclusion, and not a favorable one at that. Hitoshi leaves the room in a foul mood, and Oboro follows dejectedly.

They aren't going to help.

What is he supposed to do now?

How is he supposed to help Izuku?

He doesn't know how the tracker works. He can't lead Hitoshi somewhere he doesn't know, and he refuses to lure a single kid, a *child*, to a villain's hideout all alone, even if he could. It's not right. He wouldn't be much of a Hero himself if he led Hitoshi to the villains and expected him to save Izuku and Bakugou single handedly.

Hitoshi is grumbling to himself as he stalks down the hallways. He may actually be grumbling to Oboro, but ghost isn't entirely sure. Still, he offers his presence in nothing more than a quick flicker of overhead light directly above Hitoshi.

Oboro can't help but perk up when Kirishima rounds the corner, rushing behind Hitoshi with a sense of urgency.

Turns out not all the students are against the rescue mission.

Hitoshi is led back to Yaoyorozu's now empty hospital room where she and Todoroki are waiting. The icy-hot teenager is perched on the edge of the foot of the bed and as soon as Hitoshi and Kirishima are in the room, the red-head is easing the door shut behind them.

Then, suddenly there was a plan.

It was half baked, really. As he stands in the corner of the room, he can't help but wince as they talk of rushing right into the villain's secret hideout. Oboro bites his lip as he flickers the bathroom light just enough to catch Hitoshi's attention.

He's desperate to get Izuku back too, but even he knows that they're likely to fail if they don't give this any thought past following the tracker to the pinged location and finding a way in. The rescue aspect is left far too broad for Oboro's taste, and he makes sure to convey that through frantic flickering that draws in a suspicious looking Todoroki's gaze as well.

They plot for a while, until Hitoshi's phone chimes with a text from his mother requesting him to return home for the night.

The four of them decide to take the night to prepare, rest and think this through before meeting in the morning to iron out the little details of their plan.

It only makes sense since Hitoshi has to get home, and both he and Oboro know that a search party will form if he doesn't show up, and since Yaoyorozu is stuck in the hospital for overnight observation due to her head injury.

They'd be more likely to be found out of Hitoshi went missing in the night, or if Yaoyorozu disappeared from the hospital without a trace. Shota would definitely be on their trail then, and the longer they can do this without interference, the better.

Now though, early the following evening, they stand in a group and wait for the one with the tracker. She'd already been discharged, but was just getting dressed into clothes that weren't a papery hospital provided pajamas.

"Hey, are you, like, hiding in the bush?" Oboro snorts a laugh to himself at Kirishima's awkward question. Hitoshi stiffens where he is in fact hiding partially in the hospital shrubbery.

"Yeah, uh," Hitoshi rubs at the back of his neck, "sorta. Aizawa-Sensei can't know I'm here. It would be detrimental if he found out, and I'm sure death would be more pleasant."

"Oh yeah, right," Kirishima nods seriously, "he'd probably give you a detention, right? He is pretty scary. Y'know, it's pretty manly of you to come along, I mean, you're not even in our class you're risking so much to help."

"Um, yeah," Hitoshi huffs out sheepishly, "something like that."

Hitoshi is quiet for a second before he shakes his head, "Izuku is practically family. I'd do anything for him, and I know he'd do the same for me too."

Kirishima nods solemnly, wiping at watery eyes as he claps Hitoshi on the shoulder. "So manly."

It takes a couple more minutes for Yaoyorozu to finally emerge from the hospital, tracker clutched in his hand. She glances sharply, but kindly, at the boys waiting for her, "everyone ready?"

Oboro can't say he's surprised that the four of them actually all show up ready to go—but what it surprising if Tenya joining them with slumped shoulders and a glare shot at Todoroki.

It definitely has something to do with Stain. Probably. Unless they have some other kind of beef he doesn't know about.

Tenya says he's just here to make sure his classmates don't do anything stupid, which is probably true, but Oboro can see a light familiar to Tensei's sheer determination shining in the younger Iida's gaze as well. He's proud of the young man Tenya has become—a lot like his older brother.

Oboro actually feels a little better now that Tenya's joining the party. Responsible and rational, and hopefully he'll be able to wrangle his

classmates so they don't do anything stupid or dangerous.

Hope swirls in the ghost's chest as the group of five heads away from the hospital already bickering about which train to get on and which directions will be fastest.

Maybe this actually *will* work?

God, for Izuku's sake, he really hopes so.

More hours pass.

Izuku hurts a lot more now. He hurts to the point his face is permanently twisted in agony, and the poor little ghost child looks so worried. Kacchan at his side keeps muttering about '*how much of a fuckin' idiot he is for following him*', but Izuku hears the concern in his snarling tone and promises to the both of them that he's alright.

He's really not. He's been sitting with two broken arms for two days now—two days at least. He's lost some time when pain outweighs the fear and he succumbs to unconsciousness. But he's sure it's been over forty-eight hours in the time he's been awake.

Kurogiri is always kind enough to offer the time if Izuku's head is clear enough to do some mental math.

It's been quite a few hours since Kurogiri had given him any Advil—he hadn't even seen the void-Quirked villain since Shigaraki had strolled into the room after another long day of sleep.

Izuku knows he goes quiet now, painfully quiet to the point where Kacchan's heel presses back into his shin where he has just enough give in his chains to move. Izuku can't help but think Kacchan is more worried about him then he's letting on, and it's honestly touching.

"I don't like that you're hurt like you are," Hana is once again sitting in front of him, tucked into a small little ball as she stares at him with cat-like eyes. That's also touching.

"I'm okay," he tells her softly, barely aware of the villains in the room. Most are in the room, but they're all so busy talking at the booths to notice Izuku talking to nothing. Kacchan does though, but he smartly keeps quiet.

"You're not," she insists, "you're really hurt and Tenko and Kurogiri

don't *care*, and the rest of them don't even *look* at you... I don't want you to die too..."

Izuku sucks in a shaky breath, "I won't die, Hana."

"Damn fuckin' right you won't," Kacchan hisses under his breath, "Deku won't die you shitty little brat. Don't say things like that."

Hana's nose wrinkles as she regards Kacchan.

"He's right," Izuku nods slowly, "it's just breaks. Believe it or not, this has happened before—well, not the being kidnapped part, but breaking my bones. Would you believe I broke both my legs *and* my arm all at the same time? Don't you worry, as soon as we're rescued, I'll be fixed up by the hospital and probably some healing Quirks, and then I'll be good as new."

"What if that takes too long?"

Izuku doesn't know how to console the little girl. It's obvious Hana is too clever to just believe his words, and he shudders at the thought of what this child must've seen hanging around this bar. Izuku just wilts under her intense gaze. He doesn't have a response.

"You said... you said your ghost friend could help you," Izuku cocks his head as he listens, "could... can I help at all?"

A 'no' sits on the tip of his tongue. They'd already determined that Hana wouldn't be able to locate Shota, or Hizashi, or Oboro or Hitoshi. He doubts she'd even know any of the other Pros Izuku could send her to find.

But then he thinks back to Oboro being able interact with things. Maybe... maybe she could untie his knots? He could probably get Kacchan unlocked if he could just move his arms without the restraints.

"Do you know how to untie knots?" Izuku asks quietly. Hana looks momentarily confused before she leans down to look at the knots tying his wrists together and to the leg of Kacchan's chair. Kacchan himself jolts slightly against his own restraints, blowing out a quiet breath of what Izuku could almost hear as hope.

"Um," the little girl furrows her brow, "maybe? I'm not good at touching stuff though."

“Try touching me,” Izuku offers desperately.

It should work—he's not too cold. Todoroki isn’t around, and Hana hasn’t touched him. The bar is actually pleasantly warm considering it’s a villain’s lair, and he hasn’t even heard whispers of the vestiges which is a little bit worrying.

He can’t see a reason why she wouldn’t be able to channel his energy into untying the ropes, which is why he’s completely thrown for a loop when she goes to touch his knee and phases right through it.

Izuku sucks in a startled breath at the assault of cold, but it didn’t feel anything like the cold he’d felt when he developed hypothermia in Hosu.

“I’m sorry,” Hana yelps, “are you okay? You said I should—Tenko always *hates* when I try’n touch ‘im, complains it’s cold. I-I thought you said it would be different!”

Izuku tried to formulate a response, but all he can really think is ‘*why??*’. Why hadn’t that worked? He’d tried to open himself up like he practiced with Oboro. There should be no reason why that didn’t work. Oboro touching him was like second nature now. Izuku did exactly the same thing he’d do if it was Oboro reaching for him, and it hadn’t worked. *What?*

“Is something supposed to happen now, Deku, because it sure as shit ain’t.”

“Shit,” Izuku seethes out under his breath. “I don’t know what... try again?”

The little girl looks nervous, but she reaches out to touch him again, and still just phases through.

“I don’t understand,” Izuku squeezes his eyes shut. “You should be able to... why isn’t it working?”

“Why isn’t *what* working?”

Izuku and Kacchan tense up simultaneously as Shigaraki’s drawl snaps from the doorway. He’s stood scanning over them like he’s looking for some plot or plan they’re coming up with, looking right over Hana.

Izuku curses the villain’s very existence as their *plan* shuffles away from him cautiously.

“What are you Hero brats doing?” the villain sneers unhappily. “An escape plan is pointless, there’s no point trying to get past us, and if you try, you’re as good as dead, *got it?*”

Izuku manages a weak, distracted nod while Kacchan just grinds his teeth angrily.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Hero,” Hana whispers from the bar, “I tried to help.”

He gives her a small smile and a nod. He doesn’t want her to take any blame for this. He doesn’t know why his Quirk isn’t working with her, but that’s not her fault.

Shigaraki had made himself busy in front of a TV in the room, clicking through the channels before he grins to himself, “Sensei mentioned this would be on, and I love to watch Heroes squirm. Boohoo, you two NPCs went missing. Whatever.”

Izuku looks up to see Shota, Nezu and Vlad King on the screen. He frowns to himself at their dressed-up attire, and it takes a probably too long second to realize they’re doing a press conference. About them. Oh God.

The other villains gather to watch the conference as well, but they're kind enough (or cruel enough, depending on how you look at it) to leave a gap so Izuku and Kacchan can see the TV too. Most of the villains just turn to watch along, all looking disgustingly amused.

“This aired earlier today, but it’s been on reruns since,” Shigaraki smiles scarily, enjoying the way their teachers suffer through questions, “look at that, Eraserhead looks like he’s gonna *cry*— I thought he was tougher than that. Stupid Heroes. He should be glad I took you two insufferable brats. Less dumb Hero kids to babysit.”

Izuku feels his own eyes water as the conference continues. As his teachers apologize for something that’s not even remotely their fault. It’s Shigaraki’s fault. He’s the one who ordered the attack on the camp, and *kidnapped* them.

“Enjoying the show, Hero brat?” Shigaraki taunts, “are you enjoying watching your high and mighty teachers at the mercy of the public? Not so tough now, are they?”

Izuku just shrinks in on himself as Shota bows apologetically, apologizing for something that's not his fault, on live TV.

He just wants to go *home*...

Chapter End Notes

There will probably be just one more chapter for the kidnapping arc, and then I have something fun planned for after all this angst, so there's that to look forwards to!

I thought I'd give your guys a heads up that this fic will probably only cover up to the fifth season of the anime, unless there's something in the sixth season that I love and want to incorperate when it comes out, but I'm doubtful of that since I have a good ending for this in mind!

Anyways, as usual! Lemme know what you thought of this chapter! I adore each and every single comment I get, and I do love to see the kudos and bookmarks going up! We're so close to 10k kudos and I'm legit blown away that you guys are liking this that much! Thank you all so much for your support! <3

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

> Hello! Sorry for the wait. I literally could not for the life of me figure out how to actually word this. I had it planned out and everything, but whenever I sat down to write I just *didn't*. But I figured it out, so hopefully it came together decently :)
>
> Not much to say, so, as always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The train ride is long— just under two hours. They're due to hit the station closest to the pinged location on the tracker around ten PM.

Oboro hangs back a row behind the students, close enough to listen and watch, but far enough away that there's no risk of him touching any of them or getting in the way.

Hitoshi looks around every so often, and when Oboro happens to see the purple-haired teen gnawing on his bottom lip as he searches, he reaches up to phase through the overhead light above him. It flickers faintly like the bulb is dying, and each time Hitoshi relaxes a little bit when he spots it. It's faint enough that it doesn't draw in anyone else's attention, and Oboro's thankful for that.

They might get suspicious if all the lights around the flicker wherever they go. Izuku would be pissed if his classmates figured Oboro out.

The tracker is located in the Kamino Ward area— that's as much as Yaoyorozu supplies to her classmates. Oboro wishes she had've been more specific in her reading of the tracker so he could go on ahead and scope out what they were up against—scope out Izuku— but that's not going to happen. She's being careful.

Kamino ward is bustling with activity when they arrive, even so late in the evening. The students crowd together as to not get lost in the crowds, and Oboro hangs back a step or so.

He's at the point now where he feels like he's being a bad influence. He should be stopping this, not encouraging it. Not only is he leading Shota's students into something that could very well get them killed, but he'd encouraged Hitoshi too, who isn't even a Heroics student.

He wants to feel bad, truly he does, but he just can't. Izuku needs them. Izuku needs *him*. No one else understands how much danger Izuku's really in. He's with All for One—the current One for All Quirk user is at the mercy of the one trying to destroy the Quirk. No one knows. No one sees the *true* danger.

Maybe it's not very heroic of him, but he desperately wants to help. It really is selfish, but he's *desperate*. He's so desperate.

And it's not like he put the idea into the kid's heads—well, Hitoshi, yes, but the others? Todoroki and Kirishima came up with this themselves. They're the ones who rallied class 1-A to try and help with the rescue. Yaoyorozu was clever enough to stick a tracker on the Nomu, and Tenya... Tenya is smart enough to keep his distance from this if he really wanted to.

Oboro bites his lip as he hurries after the group.

They're smart enough to consider the fact they're recognizable, and they dress accordingly. Yaoyorozu might have a little too much fun dressing her classmates up, but Oboro too gets a kick outta seeing Hitoshi dressed in flash clothes with his hair slicked back.

"The villains don't even know what I look like," Hitoshi had complained whilst he tugged on the gold chain around his neck, going unheard by the 1-A kids. Oboro tried to give encouragement by flickering a string of fairy lights strung up in front of a department store, but that just deepened his scowl, "of course you're entertained."

Oboro just laughs, ceasing he flickering of the lights as he moves to phase a hand through Hitoshi's arm. Hitoshi jumps in surprise, tearing away from where Oboro had waved through him.

"*Ahh*—" Hitoshi flushes deeply as the 1-A kids turn to him in confusion, "—ouch. I uh, tripped and, uh, stubbed my toe. Ow." He rubs sheepishly at the back of his neck until the other students return to their hushed conversation, "you're an asshole, Ro, you know that?"

Oboro snickers as he joins the 1-A kids.

Yaoyorozu leads the students for a second until the press conference from earlier catches their attention. It's no surprise none of them had seen it, but it still hurts Oboro's heart to see his school friend pushed into a corner and being poked at. The media really are vultures—sinking their talons into anything news worthy.

Oboro drags a hand through his hair, shaking his head.

The students are distracted—anger and fear on their faces. Hitoshi looks rightfully pissed as he stares up at his uncle's face. "That's so fucked up," Hitoshi snarls softly, "they're treating them like... like *villains*."

Kirishima at the purple-haired teen's side gives a slow nod, not looking away from the screen.

The teens all looked stressed as the crowd breaks into murmurs of agreement, criticizing Yuuei and its staff. It makes Oboro sick how fast the crowd turned on the Heroes, like it was their fault the villains were attack. Like it was their fault the villains were targeting them.

Oboro grits his teeth in annoyance, a fierce protectiveness clawing at his chest as he takes in the student's scared faces. They're scared, and nervous, and suddenly in a place they don't want to be in. Adults around them criticizing their teachers—the teachers who were willing to lay their lives on the line to protect them were being attacked for not being *good enough*.

He phases through some of the adults in the crowd making the rudest and loudest comments and takes great pleasure in the way they full body shiver and whip around to shout at someone who's not there.

Hitoshi is the last one he phases through, but it's just a brush of his fingertips through the teen's wrist. Instead of getting angry like the first time, the teen just turns slowly and takes the gesture for what it was, "c'mon," he tells the 1-A kids tensely, "this is bullshit. Let's go."

The kids tear themselves away from the crowd, tension in no way draining from their bodies, even when they're away from those entitled bastard turning against the only people keeping them safe.

They follow Yaoyorozu's tracker through dark streets and back alleyways. The students barely talk, all settling into the seriousness of the situation. This is when things are finally starting to feel real. They're going against their teachers, classmates and the Pro Heroes to do this.

The building they find is... empty. There's no activity. It looks abandoned and overgrown with weeds and moss, but then again, what villain hideout wants to stand out?

Oboro leaves the children to scope further—hopefully to find Izuku

and Bakugou before the students can put themselves into harm's way and do something stupid. It's not hard getting into the building when he doesn't have a body. He phases through the wall with ease, and draws in an anxious break when he's inside.

At first glance, he doesn't see much. It looks like an abandoned building, trashed and dirty and forgotten about over the years. Oboro side steps over piles of junk littering the floor, and frowns to himself. What a dump.

He continues on, cautious gaze surveying over everything.

It's dark and cold.

Doesn't look like much, to be honest.

It's not until he spots something out of the corner of his eye the he freezes. His eyes widen, and he forces himself forwards towards it. The ghost sucks in a breath, choking on the foul taste.

The closer he gets, the more it *smells*— the scent is deep and aged. Foul. He doesn't even know if it actually smells or if... or if his brain is making him smell it. Suddenly, the entire layout of the abandoned warehouse smells like toxic chemicals and... and *dead*. Oboro feels sick in a way he hasn't in quite some years, the scent churning the stomach he no longer has. It's a surreal feeling.

He lets his gaze scan over the rows of fluid filled tanks. Rows of submerged creatures. He's grateful for the fact he doesn't need to breathe because he surely *isn't*. The shock and fear squeezes at his airways. How can someone even breathe in a place like this, staring at *this*. It's morbid, and disgusting. It's... sick.

This is... it's not what he's *expecting*.

These are... these are Nomu. There's no doubt about it. This is a room full of Nomu. Dozens of them. This isn't a secret hideout, this is... it's a factory. A *Nomu factory*.

The thought sinks into Oboro's chest and twists in a way that feels like he suffocating. Shigaraki really does have an army—not just villains but Nomu too. He's got a full *army* at his disposal. Fuck.

He heaves a breath as he sneaks in further. It's pointless to sneak, he's a ghost, but it makes him feel better. It's creepy, and terrifying, and Oboro hates every second of it. He hopes that the kids outside are

being smart and not rushing in. He doesn't want them to see this. He doesn't want to see this.

He fears for the worst, a sick feeling weighing in his stomach as he thinks about Izuku being in a place like this. Surrounded by these creatures and smelling what really can only be described as *death*. These are dead bodies. These Nomu *were* people.

Oboro chokes out a noise that could possibly be a choked off inhale. He's not sure. He's never been this scared in his life, this is... it's terrifying. Knowing what this is and seeing it with his own eyes—knowing the same sick bastard to do this has Izuku and Bakugou.

The ghost grits his teeth, squaring his shoulders as he moves further, past the sickening display of unresponsive zombie soldiers. He's going to find them, and he's going to rescue them.

The TV shuts off and Katsuki tears his attention away from it. He can almost feel Shigaraki smiling like a fucking manic behind that weird-ass hand on his face. Creepy bastard.

"Isn't that strange?" Katsuki grits his teeth, glaring into Shigaraki. The villains are all crowded around, and Izuku has gotten steadily quieter at his feet. When he looks down, he can't even tell if the other teen is awake or not, head hanging like it's too much effort to keep it upright, "the Heroes are becoming the bad guys..."

Shigaraki's voice curls in an amused sort of way, "it really seems like they're not dealing with this very well at all, now, are they? You two go missing, and the whole world turns on those protecting them. So much criticism, but everyone makes a mistake or two right? It's funny, it's not like they're supposed to be *perfect*, now are they?"

Katsuki tries in vain to tug free of the cuffs on his hands, lip curling in a snarl when it hardly budges. What he wouldn't give to slam that bastard's head into the counter.

The villain doesn't take the hint that Katsuki wants him to shut up, just continues on mockingly, "modern day Heroes sure have it rough, don't you think Bakugou? Midoriya? Oh, well, looks like our little *Disciple* is down for the count once again. Pity."

A surge if panic crawls up Bakugou's spine as Shigaraki steps close, using three fingers to hook under Izuku's forehead and drag his unconscious head upwards to inspect it. A fourth finger settles, and

Katsuki bites hard at his tongue hard to keep himself from lashing out as a fifth finger gets to close to his childhood friend's head. Blood rushes his mouth as his teeth sink into his tongue, and it curdles unpleasantly when it settles in his stomach.

"Oh well, I don't need him anyways." Shigaraki shakes his head, pulling away suddenly so Izuku's head drops again, "anyways, back to our *conversation*. A Hero in this current system only cares about money and glory. And since society buys into that, those idiotic rules, anyone deemed a loser is shoved aside. So, we want to pose some questions..."

Bakugou glares at Shigaraki as he turns his back to them, returning to his barstool. He pauses for a second, head angled towards them, before speaking again, "what is a Hero? What is Justice? Is this society truly fair? Soon, everyone will be asking. And that... that's when we'll know we've truly won."

Shigaraki's voice takes on that curl again—prideful and inviting, and Katsuki feels sick. "You like winning, don't you?"

Katsuki's chains rattle as he tenses— he'd known that was where this was going, but he's still not prepared. He's a Goddamned *Hero*, not some villain scum. He keeps his mouth shut, afraid he'll say one of those stupid things Deku nags him about, gritting his teeth as he glares. He's near vibrating with pent up *rage*, and he really, *really* wants to light Shigaraki's ugly fucking face up in an explosion.

"Dabi," the villain gestures to Katsuki calmly, "let him go."

Katsuki tries not to jerk up in anticipation as the words leave the villain's mouth. Yes. Let him go, so he can set this whole shitty bar up in *flames*. So he can scorch those ropes off of Deku and get him out of here and to a Goddamn hospital where the stupid nerd belongs.

The villains argue lightly back and forth about whether it's a good idea or not, but Katsuki is busy bursting with rage and poorly contained suspense. He hears the word 'recruit', and that familiar fire is lighting up in his stomach, but he still remains still. Still and uninterested. Pliant. A ruse.

Katsuki watches with carefully trained eyes as the spandex villain steps forward, crouching down to unlock him. His muscles tense, but he forces them to relax. There's conversation going on around him, but he can't hear it over the blood rushing through his ears.

He keeps calm, rubbing at raw wrists when the cuffs are off, and then the villain is moving down to unlock to his feet, shoving Deku out of the way to access the locks. Just a little bit longer. He can wait just a bit *longer*...

When he's completely free, he doesn't waste a second to kick the villain and launch himself from the chair. There's a second where he feels bad as Izuku tumbles back with the flying chair. He sees Deku unmoving on the floor out of the corner of his eye, no longer hunched over with the ropes looped around the chair leg. He's still tied up, but no longer tied to anything. Still, doesn't help much with the nerd *unconscious*. Shit.

He has half a mind to go to him, but he's already launching himself at the villains, throwing an explosion at Shigaraki's face. It feels damn good. The bastard deserves it.

The hand on Shigaraki's face blows off, and for the first time, Katsuki gets a glance at his ugly mug. Shigaraki glares, eye twitching in annoyance. Katsuki doesn't look up at him long, just a quick glance up to verify that the hand had come from his face.

Katsuki doesn't dare look back at Izuku as he pulls himself to his feet, keeping his head ducked as he does so. The villains don't move as the smoke from his explosion clears. They don't move, but they're tense and on high alert. Good.

"I'm done listening to your endless talking," he grits out, "can you not get to the point or do you just like your own voice? Basically, what you're saying is you want to cause some trouble and you want me join you..."

That rage is back—that deeply engrained one that Deku always manages to stir up by thinking he's better than Katsuki, but it's *worse*. It's *more*. It's dark, and fire-y and pumping through his veins. He's *pissed*. This asshole villain wants him to join their side. They want him to turn on his school, on his classmates and teachers—on being a *Hero*?

...

Not happening. "Well, *screw you*."

Katsuki chances a glance back at Izuku, he's still on his side unmoving. He's lying on one of his arms, and the other is sprawled on the floor, exactly where he'd landed. He needs to get him out, but it's

still eight against one even if he's better then all of them. He doubts he'd be able to make a solid escape with Izuku who's about as helpful as a sack of potatoes in his state. Fucking hell.

"I like to win," Katsuki grins as he looks back at Shigaraki, "I wanna win just like All Might, no matter what you have to offer me. I'm going to be a Hero, and I'm going to surpass All Might. I'll surpass *Deku* and all the other extras in my class and that will never change! *Understand*?"

He doesn't falter as the villains circle him like he's a threat. He *is* a threat. It's about damn time they realize that he's not a stupid little sheep that'll be easily persuaded into joining their stupid fucking villain club just because he's *done* some shitty things and has *had* some shitty things done to him.

He's prepared to blow this shitty bar up, grab Izuku and run. Shigaraki doesn't scare him. They don't scare him. *They* should be scared of *him*.

They're all watching him, prepared for whatever he's got brewing. It would take an idiot to miss the fact that they need him for something — they wouldn't have gone through the effort to attack the camp and kidnap him if they didn't. So, there's a good chance that they won't kill him.

But he has no qualms about knocking them down if it means he and Deku walk out of this.

The villains don't look particularly concerned even though he's free. He takes a subtle step to the side to block Izuku from view as the villains talk about him, scrutinize him.

Katsuki knows he's talking, but he's talking out his ass at this point. He doesn't know what he's saying, but he can see it riling Shigaraki up. Anything to distract these idiots from Izuku. There's yelling; that purple-void villain is shouting a warning— and then it's quiet.

Shigaraki's talking again, but Katsuki isn't really listening. The only things he's really listening for is response cues, which he half asses his way through.

They're distracted, now's his chance for escape, but he doesn't know how—what to do. Deku's as good as useless on the floor, and he can't sneak back to grab him without being spotted doing so. And they don't need Izuku like they need him. Izuku is the one in danger here.

“Master...” Katsuki’s attention snaps to the villain at the oddity, “lend me your power...”

“A master,” Katsuki teases darkly, hoping it’ll rile the villain up anymore. He needs a distraction. A diversion. If Shigaraki loses his shit, so will everyone else and he’ll have an opening. Katsuki takes a tiny, unnoticeable step back towards Izuku as he continues, “I thought you were the boss around here, but you’re just a *sidekick*.”

“Kurogiri, Compress, it’s time to put him back to sleep.”

So maybe that backfired a little. Katsuki grits his teeth and takes another small step backwards. Deku still hasn’t moved—it would be a good time for him to wake the fuck up.

“If you want me to listen,” Katsuki taunts loudly. *Plus Ultra*, right? “Then get on your knees and beg!”

He’s already fucked, might as well go out with a bang. He needs a plan, and fast. He needs to get to the backdoor, it’s the only exit he’s spotted. That’s the only escape.

He wants to blow them away, light the place up in sparks and explosions, but he can’t with Izuku in the state he’s in—there’s no way he’d be able to grab Izuku and get them both out—not when the villains scattered around like annoying *bugs*. And besides, that portal villain is far too fast for him to even try anyways.

There has to be a way; they can’t go out like *this*—

There’s a knock. Katsuki startles, as do the villains. He turns faintly to look back at the door, then shifts his attention to glance over at Izuku while everyone’s distracted. He clenches his teeth.

“Hello?” calls from the other side of the door, “I’ve got a pizza delivery here?”

No one moves—not even Katsuki. What the hell is this? A pizza?

He’s jostled as the wall is smashed apart, and he breathes a sigh of relief when he sees All Might there. This is it. The diversion. He turns on shaky feet and races towards Izuku. He’s still unconscious, and worry worms its way into his heart as he hefts the other boy into his arms.

“Now would be a fuckin’ *swell* time for you to wake the hell up,

Izuku." Izuku doesn't stir. Katsuki tightens his grip.

It's not just All Might, Katsuki realizes.

There's a whole team of villains. And cops. He watches, holding Izuku protectively, as the villains are restrained by Kamui Woods and some even kicked in the head by some old geezer he doesn't know.

For a second, everything seems like it's okay, and then Shigaraki is ordering the void villain to do something. All Might looks too smug though, and Katsuki has a bad feeling. He clutches tighter at Izuku, careful not to jostle him. Fuck, he really wishes Izuku hadn't of been a stupid idiot and hadn't followed him.

He's more or less focused on keeping Izuku out of harm's way, especially since the stupid Pros have hardly batted an eyelash at his state. To focused on the villains. Katsuki's just glad Izuku's still fucking breathing.

He watches silently as they talk—All Might and Shigaraki speaking in tongues about the 'master' he'd mentioned earlier. He tries to keep attention off of himself and his unconscious classmate, not moving a muscle at they talk.

The pockets of black—what the hell even *is* that—come out of nowhere. They come out of nowhere, and then there's creatures—those *Nomu* things he'd seen all over the news crawling out of them. Katsuki feels sick all over again as he drags Izuku back a couple steps. It's genuine panic. The Pros, as seasoned as they are panicking.

Katsuki turns to All Might, but somehow ends up choking instead.

It's... it's in his mouth. What the fuck is this? He thrashes around, tightening his hold on Izuku as he does so. What the fucking hell? It feels like he's being pulled somewhere from the inside out. All Might looks momentarily startled, hand on Katsuki's shoulder lifting in concern, but then he's... gone.

No, that's not right. All Might's not gone, *Katsuki*'s gone.

And he'd dragged Izuku along for the ride.

Oboro falters, stumbling down to his knees as something happens. The calmness of the abandoned warehouse disappears as the ground rumbles with some sort of... interference. He really, really hopes it's

not the students, though he doesn't even know how they'd managed such a big earth-shaking explosion.

It doesn't take long to figure out, because soon Pros are rushing in.

The Nomu are being grabbed, restrained even if they're inactive right now. Oboro sees Tiger out of the corner of his eye, pulling an unconscious Ragdoll out from one of the chambers and his heart drops into his stomach. He hadn't even *noticed*—

A large hand is reaching in through the hole in the wall, and threads are shooting around and entangling around the Nomu. He sees Gang Orca clutching at a Nomu, and police are rushing in as well. They're being captured before Oboro's eyes and it's a weight off his shoulders.

He's so glad that there are Pros here—maybe the students won't feel compelled to try anything now that they can see moves being made.

Besides, all Oboro really needed from them was a location. And he got it—he doesn't want them trying to help. He'd much rather they stay safe and let the Heroes handle it now. With the Nomu taken care of, he can focus on finding Izuku and Bakugou.

He turns to head deeper, but freezes in place as footsteps approach.

"I'm sorry, Tiger," a deep, calm voice offers from the shadows. Oboro tenses up and he spins to face the voice. "But Ragdoll's Quirk was just so useful."

Oboro stares at the emerging figure. He's terrified, watching and listening—waiting. He knows he should be rushing the villain, trying to help in any way he can even without Izuku, but he can't. He feels frozen. Fear drops over his head as he gets a good look at the man, the villain, sucking in a panicked breath as the man continues, "I just had to take it... How could I not?"

Take it...?

Oboro knows who this is now. He knows what's happening. Holy shit, that's—

"All for One," Oboro breathes out, knowing the Pros won't hear him. Knowing the villain won't hear him. He takes a step back, body moving away from the threat on autopilot. All for One just keeps stepping closer, unafraid of the Pros. His calm footsteps echo in the silenced chaos of the warehouse.

He cowers back, and he *hates* himself for it. He's dead, yet here he is struck frozen with fear. It's not like he can die again.

He stands back and *watches* as the Pros fight the threat. He watches as they're knocked down like dominoes one my one. He watches, barely able to move; he doesn't know what there is for him to do—how to *help*.

There's blood and they're hurt—God, they're so *hurt* and he can't help. There's nothing he can do—not with his Quirk, and not without Izuku. He's *useless*. He's useless, and he's going to watch these Heroes die because of it.

They're going to *die*—

It's coughing that snaps Oboro from his frozen state, finally managing to tear his attention away from the blood and what looks very much like *death*, eyes landing on Bakugou. He's coming out of black... goo? A portal of sorts like Shigaraki's henchman?

What?

"Dammit!" Bakugou growls through the coughing, and Oboro stares in shock. There, appearing from nowhere, is not just Bakugou, but an unconscious Izuku. He could cry from happiness. The green-haired teen doesn't look any better than he had the night he was taken, but he doesn't look that much *worse* either. "What the hell?!"

Oboro sees a faint rise and fall of the unconscious teen's chest, clutched tightly in Bakugou's arms.

He's *alive*. They're both alive.

Before Oboro can even make a move towards them, more portals are opening and the League— the *entire* League of Villains— are dropping to the ground. The panic back, but he can see Izuku now. He can see him; he knows where he is. He can help.

All for One is talking to Shigaraki, and Oboro takes that as his chance to get to Bakugou and Izuku. He knows no one but Izuku can see him, but he still keeps silent until he's settled at Izuku's side.

His hands hover over the unconscious teenager. He wants to reach over and touch him, to use his Quirk as an escape, or a distraction—as anything right now, but he's scared. Izuku is unconscious.

He's unconscious, and he can't say whether he's cold, or hurt, or if he can even *handle* the Quirk in his state. Oboro could kill him if Izuku's temperature drops into a hypothermia state. He doesn't know if the vestiges have been hanging around.

"Izuku," he whispers desperately, "c'mon, man, I need you to wake up. I-I don't know if I can use your Quirk— I-I mean, use *my* Quirk. I don't want to hurt you, buddy, *please,* tell me what to *do*—"

Izuku doesn't stir. Oboro lets out a cry, dragging his palms down his face. He feels so useless. There's nothing he can do without making things *worse*.

He doesn't know what to do. There are so many villains, and Bakugou's hands are literally full with Izuku. He can't just risk Izuku like this— can't risk using their Quirks when he can't be sure Izuku will be alright after. He *can't*. He knows that using his Quirk might actually *kill* him, and Oboro would never forgive himself for that.

The thought of hoping for Hitoshi and the 1-A kids to help tastes acidic in his mouth.

He prays the students are far, far away by this point. Tenya would've forced them away, wouldn't he? Tenya knows who Hitoshi is. Tenya knows the *fire* they're playing with simply by being here, by having Hitoshi here.

Oboro glances back at the villains. They've stopped talking. Shigaraki, and All for One. It's... quiet.

Then, "ah, there you are."

Oboro startles when something barrels forcefully at All for One. The villain doesn't look surprised, but Oboro sure as hell is to see the Number One Hero. Oboro positions himself between the villains and Bakugou and Izuku as All Might and All for One collide.

Debris flies and Oboro's shocked to the core when All for One manages to hold up All Might's power. The force of them levelling each other's power sends everyone but Oboro flying. He swirls around to track where Bakugou and Izuku had been tossed; finding them through the bits of settling warehouse.

Bakugou's teeth are gritted as he clutches at his side, looking like he's trying to push himself up— Izuku on the other hand, had been tossed to the side, laying limply on his side.

Oboro forces himself to Izuku's side, dropping to his knees behind him. He swears to protect him. He doesn't know how he will, but he *will*.

The League is up too, but they're after Bakugou again. The blonde shoots Izuku a desperate look before he's heading in the opposite direction. Leading the League away from the other teen.

Oboro wishes more than anything that he could help. That there was a way to do something.

It's shocking how the villain holds his own against All Might, and keeps standing. Oboro has never heard of anyone—*anything*—withstanding All Might's power.

He knew All for One was a threat, but this is... it's *horrifying*. There's a villain able to take hits like that? He's just been... in hiding all this time, waiting and watching? It makes Oboro's head feel dizzy.

The fight is terror-inducing. Oboro doesn't want to watch, but he can't take his eyes away. He glances between Bakugou fending for himself and the battle between All Might and All for One. He wishes there was more he could do, but the only thing he knows he can do is protect Izuku.

The fight gets out of hand very fast.

Bakugou is still keeping the League distracted, but All Might is getting tossed around by multiple Quirks in the same body. Oboro knows that's what All for One does, but it's still shocking to the core to see it in action. To see how easily he throws around the Number One Hero.

He's losing, and Oboro doesn't know how to help anyone—how to help Izuku, or Bakugou, and All Might even. Izuku is a sitting duck here in the rubble, and there's nothing Oboro can do.

He thinks he's crying. He feels tears on his cheeks. He's watching a war in real time and he can't do anything to help. All Might is going to lose—they're going to lose the number one Hero—

"'boro?" it's weak, but Oboro's head snaps down to where a bleary eyed Izuku is staring hazily up at him. His face is pressed in a constant wince of pain, but he's talking, and alert and *not* dead.

"Izuku," Oboro breathes out. He hadn't even realized he'd been holding his breath. "Hey, shh. It's okay. It'll all be okay. *You're* okay,

alright? I-I'll get you outta here somehow. It's okay."

Izuku's head lulls to the side, towards the fight, as All Might's attack is countered. It sends him flying into one of the few remaining walls with a crash. Oboro winces at the impact, dust and debris settling around the Pro who's slowly hoisting himself back to his feet.

Izuku freezes in horror. His body tenses up, and he's trying to push himself up on broken arms as he takes in the scene. He's putting the pieces together, and the look in his eyes scares Oboro.

"K-kacchan, no..." Izuku wheezes before straightening slightly with a wince, "n-no. All Might... W-wait, i-is that—"

"Stop moving," Oboro pleads desperately, "you're hurt, Izuku, like really, really bad. You need medical attention. Desperately. You can't just jump into a fight—"

"Use the Quirk."

"Izuku," Oboro tries softly, "I *can't*. You've been in captivity for almost three days; you're *hurt*—"

Oboro feels Izuku's hand on his wrist, grabbing tightly. The teen pulls him closer until they're just about nose to nose. He's clutching around Oboro's now solid wrist, and there's no sign of Izuku keeling over. Still, the ghost stares hard at the teenager without saying a word. It doesn't feel right.

"Oboro, please," Izuku begs. "I-I don't think I can help him, but he needs it. He's going to— Please. I'm fine—I need you to help. Help *them*. They need us, Kacchan and All Might *need* us. We're Heroes, Oboro. *Please*."

Oboro squeezes his eyes shut, knowing this shouldn't happen. He shouldn't give in, not when Izuku is in the state he's in. There're still limitations, there can still be negative effects on his body. Izuku is obviously delirious, but he's right. Oboro can't just watch this happen.

He can't watch it end, *knowing* there was a chance he could've helped.

He draws in a breath as he activates his Quirk.

He really has no idea what he's aiming for when he does it. He's got two thoughts swirling in his head— distraction and protecting Bakugou. He refuses to leave the other teenager out of his sight again,

even if he's still not fond of him.

The first cloud he spots is dense— it's big, and heavy and it settles fast over Bakugou and the League. A few of the members rumble their responses to the cloud of dense fog, but the most notable one happens to be Shigaraki's snarl of '*this fuckin' shit again? Who the hell keeps doing this?!*', and knows Bakugou is probably fine in there despite his own growls of confusion and annoyance.

The second takes a second longer to spot, since it's settling overhead and it's *huge*. It crawls through the sky until it's covering nearly the whole perimeter of the entire building, stopping just shy of overlapping with the dense fog cloud keeping the League distracted.

The thing is, Oboro's never made one that *colour* before.

It's grey, and angry; looming overhead in a way none of his bright, fluffy white clouds ever have. For a second, he doesn't even think it belongs to him.

But he knows there's no wind, or change in temperature. And it had come on so suddenly. There's literally no other tell that a storm is happening— just the dark cloud suddenly above them.

A strike of lightning grounds, just shy of hitting All for One, and following that is an angry rumble of thunder. Oboro startles—staring up intently at the cloud. That... he made that? How? What the absolute hell is going on? He's never done that before!

All for One and All Might both take a second to glance up at the abnormality. All Might is the first to look back, and takes All for One's second of distraction as a chance to get the upper hand.

"I didn't know you could do that," Izuku swallows. "s'cool."

Another flash of lightning targets close to where All for One is, and Oboro is *fairly* sure he's not controlling the lightning. He'd made the cloud, but it's got a mind of its own— it'll react like any other cloud. All he can do is move it around and bring it in and out of existence.

"I don't know I could do that either," Oboro tries not to sound to shocked, but he probably fails if Izuku's cocked eyebrow is anything to go off. He's scared that it'll change course and head for Bakugou, or even them. And he'd definitely shit his pants if he accidentally stuck All Might with lightning. "I... don't know how I'm controlling it. I really don't think I am."

“That’s *not* you,” Izuku breathes out, as he stares up at the cloud, another rumble of thunder following the flash of lighting. “It’s the life support machine around his neck, it’s *metal*— it’s attracting the electricity to him.”

Oboro watches as All for One narrowly avoids another strike of lightning, attention lifting to the cloud again in an attempt to study it. All Might goes for another attack, but is thrown once again.

The fight continues.

“C’mon,” Oboro ushers Izuku up quickly, switching their point of contact so Oboro is clutching Izuku instead of the other way around, “we need to get out of here, or at least get some cover. Can you walk?”

“It’s my arms that’re broken, not my legs,” Izuku gives a pained, yet halfhearted smile. “I can walk, but what about Kacchan? And All Might?”

“I hate you sometimes,” Oboro groans, helping the teenager up to wobbly feet. He knows can’t go far if he wants the clouds to stay intact. He helps Izuku to a half standing wall, helping him sit behind it. “I don’t think I can make any more clouds, and I can’t help All Might. But Bakugou should be hidden in the fog. I’ll keep the clouds up for as long as I can—until help arrives.”

Help arrives in the form of Gran Torino and Mt Lady. The latter of the two blinks in surprise at the scene before swiping away the fog with a large hand and plucking Bakugou from the villains. Oboro sorta wants to laugh as a giant lady makes quick work fleeing with the kidnapped student, carrying him to safety in the palm of her hand.

He’s kicking and screaming. A small part of Oboro thinks Bakugou is making more of a fuss being rescued then he would’ve if he was kidnapped again.

With Oboro’s target of protection gone, he lets his hold on the fog cloud slip. It vanishes before his eyes, and he counts all the Villains. Two unconscious and the rest whipping around in an attempt to find Bakugou, who’s already gone.

Oboro watches from just over the wall as All for One force activates the void-villain's quirk, and something weird churns in his stomach at the sight.

Gran Torino is at All Might's side, and then he's suddenly rushing towards where Shigaraki and the girl in the middle school uniform are stood in front of the portal.

Oboro thinks about rematerializing the cloud just to keep them all in place, but he doesn't want to get in Gran Torino's way. He's a Pro, even if he's been retired for quite some time.

Oboro can barely blink as All for One force activates a second Quirk, that of the woman with the glasses. Oboro doesn't know her Quirk well, but suddenly all the villains are being pulled towards the middle school girl, until they all collide and tumble back into the portal.

Shigaraki is the last pulled through the portal.

What the *hell* was that?

The fight doesn't end there—it gets worse.

Oboro watches, a hand on Izuku's shoulder and keeping him down at the two of the fight in a way that screams 'to the death'. Gran Torino is out of commission after being used as a shield by All for One, and it's really just the two of them.

The cloud over head rumbles, but Oboro isn't sure how much longer it'll last. It's not supposed to be here—the temperature and weather isn't right for it. It's grasping at straws to keep going—soon the humidity it managed to draw in will settle into a downdraft and then Oboro isn't sure what'll happen.

He watches with bated breath as All Might finally gets the upper hand, catching both All for One's punch, and his face at once and *smashing* him into the ground. Izuku has once again lost consciousness, but Oboro keeps a hold on him. Izuku wanted this—he wants Oboro to help All Might.

But it's not enough.

Oboro can't hear what they're saying. He's too far away, and it's not like they're broadcasting it. He says something to All Might. Something that breaks something inside him.

All Might doesn't stop though—the fight continues.

It's not looking good. All Might has passed his time limit. Anyone can see that. Slowly he deflates as they fight. All for One just doesn't give

up. Neither looks particularly good, but All for One seems to be holding up better.

Oboro can just keep a protective hand on Izuku and watch. His cloud overhead has run out of humidity, dark grey bleeding out to pale white. It's not worth keeping around. When the cloud clears away at the blink of an eye, Oboro stops a helicopter flying close.

There's nothing else Oboro can do. He can't help anymore—not without overusing Izuku's energy and he really doesn't want to do that right now. He shouldn't have done it *once*, so twice is out of the question.

It's a dirty fight with heavy punches. The force is incredible, and it would be amazing if they weren't smashing each other into rubble and leaving craters in the already unstable building.

It's not long until the fight seems to be drawing to an end. An unfavorable one. All Might is at the end of his rope—oh God, the Number One Hero is going to *die*—

"Hey!" Oboro whips around to where he hears Hitoshi's voice. Fuck—what the hell is that kid still doing? He's going to get himself *killed*—"Asshole Villain! You always been so fuckin' ugly?"

Hitoshi is nowhere in sight, just a disembodied voice from a general direction. All for One looks in his direction for a long second, clearly processing the odd distraction from his fight with All Might that he's *winning*, "wh—"

Like clockwork, the villain stiffens. He has no visible eyes, but Oboro's sure if he did, they'd been glazed over like death, exactly like Izuku had looked during the sports festival.

It really is a cheap move in the scheme of how the fight had been going, but Oboro still thinks it's cool. Oboro is beyond thankful for Hitoshi. This must've been what Izuku was talking about when he'd ranted and raved about Hitoshi's Quirk being beyond useful for Heroics.

"On your knees, you bastard." Hitoshi snaps, and now All Might is looking at him, eyes wide with shock. All for One slowly drops down to one knee, then to the other follows heavily to the ground. "Hands behind your head."

Both hands settle behind the villain's head, and at this point, Hitoshi

narrows his own eyes at the number one Hero— Oboro knows they haven't interacted much. All Might teaches Heroics, a class Hitoshi has yet to get into. "Get 'im, All Might!"

The now small framed Hero blinks owlishly before doing as told. He's so far past his limit. He's hurt. He's bleeding and broken. He doesn't look anything like All Might, but Oboro had watched him go until he hit a wall, and then watched the man smash through said wall.

Oboro wonders what this means. What will happen now?

He has no fucking idea.

All he knows right now is that it's done.

The fight's been won.

Hitoshi can't help the welling of pride he feels when he calls out to whoever that asshole villain is and the idiot answers him. There's something satisfying about watching him drop into the demanded position and remain that way until All Might could cuff him.

He wishes he'd had the nerve to do it earlier—feels guilty that he'd left All Might to fight alone for so long. He's been too scared to even open his mouth when the fight started. He couldn't move, or even really think. None of them had moved, keeping hidden behind the building.

Todoroki, Iida, Kirishima, Yaoyorozu and himself had heard the whole fight. They'd been terrified. There was to much going on to really help, and there was no way for the five of them to do anything, even with their Quirks combined.

They'd seen Bakugou get rescued by Mt Lady, and Hitoshi had seen Izuku awkwardly stumbling his way behind a crumbled wall. He'd twitched to get to him, but remained frozen instead. He can only hope Ro had managed to find their friend, and was keeping him company.

When the villain is finally in cuffs, Hitoshi leaves the safety they'd been hidden behind and rushes towards where he'd seen Izuku stumble. He hears the 1-A kids behind him, and they crowd around when Hitoshi stumbles to his knees at an unconscious Izuku's side.

"'zuku?" he whispers, tugging his friend into his lap and brushing his bangs from his face. He's looking rough—in urgent need of medical

attention. “It’s over, Izuku, you won. You got Bakugou back. All Might won the fight.”

Izuku doesn’t stir, but he is breathing, and his heart is beating steadily. Hitoshi supposes that’s the best he can ask for considering the situation. They crowd around Izuku as an almost wall of protection against the world. Hitoshi cradles his friend in his lap, just glad he’s alive.

“Young Shinsou,” Hitoshi looks up at the strained voice, surprised to see All Might pushing his way through the group. “That was very reckless, you don’t know what that villain was capable of— *Young Midoriya*?”

“He passed out,” Hitoshi offers without looking up. All Might tenses, then crouches down to settle a hand on the green-haired teen’s chest. He looks beyond stressed and in a lot of pain.

“He needs medical attention,” All Might breathes out, “urgently. Does someone have an ETA for the EMTs?”

“We’ve got EMT’s on the way,” an officer tells them as he kneels beside All Might, “ETA three minutes. You and the kid both need attention. And the Hero in yellow— looks like he’s got quite the concussion.”

When EMTs do arrive, Midoriya is stripped from his arms, and he’s not allowed to ride with him to the hospital. All Might promises to keep a close eye on him and climbs into the back of the ambulance after Midoriya is gurney lifted in.

The five of them are escorted to the hospital to get checked out and give statements by police the police. From there, their guardians will be called and Hitoshi is already mourning his freedom, and what little life he has outside of his bedroom because he knows his family is onto him. His phone had long since been turned to ‘*do not disturb*’ but he knows there’s a mountain of texts and missed calls.

He stays with the 1-A kids for a while, the five of them sitting side by side in a row and looking mournful. They’re up to three ‘do you have any idea how stupid what you did was’ lectures, and they haven’t even seen any of their parents or the 1-A homeroom teacher.

Hitoshi doesn’t know which he’s more afraid to face.

Shota is the first to find them, stalking towards them with eyes of

burning rage. There're small flickers of *concern*, but *anger* is the main emotion here. It far outweight the concern. He's so angry he's not yelling, and that's incredibly terrifying.

He stands before them, arms laced over his chest and glaring down the line of them.

For a solid minute, he doesn't say a thing. Then, he's breathing out a heavy breath through his nose and quietly directing the 1-A students to the waiting room, where their guardians have all gathered. As they stand and scurry away, the man breathes out a looming threat of the fact they'll be receiving their punishment and consequences at school.

Hitoshi pities them before remembering this is his uncle, and he's not a 1-A student.

Shota waits until the students have cleared out and Hitoshi is sitting like a scolded schoolboy waiting to see the principal. His uncle wordlessly gestures him up, and Hitoshi knows better than to try rebelling right now. Shota's got the capture weapon, and it very well could strangle him.

"Do you have any idea how worried we all were?" Shota snaps, arms crossing over his chest.

Hitoshi deflates, shaking his head. And after a thoughtful second, he offers a slow nod.

Maybe he has a bit of an idea how worried they were.

"Your mother called me at midnight and said she couldn't find you; that you *snuck* out in the midst of all the kidnapping shit going down. Your mother and father nearly lost their *minds*. That was so irresponsible. So dangerous.

"You listen to me, as not just your uncle, but as your soon to be teacher *if* you didn't fuck up your chances of getting into my class with this *stunt*. You do not get to turn off your phone so no one can reach you. You do not get to sneak out of the house. And you certainly do *not* get to chasing after villains without permission *or* a license. You're not even in a Heroic's class, Hitoshi— my students are in big trouble, don't get me wrong, but *you* have zero excuses here. I literally can't help you. You're in so much trouble, do you understand that?"

Hitoshi gives a scolded nod, not looking up at his uncle.

Hitoshi hears the man blow out a deep breath, “glad we’re on the same page. Now, is there anything you want to say for yourself?”

“How’s Izuku?”

He’s not sure if it’s the right, or the wrong thing to say as the silence from his uncle drags out. Shota lets out another sigh, dragging his fingers through his hair, “he’ll live.”

“You know that’s not what I was asking,” Hitoshi scowls.

“I don’t think you’re in any place to be making demands,” his uncle retorts with a glare. Hitoshi wilts, eyes watering. He wipes them away with the balls of his palms, and sucks in a breath.

"Sorry." Shota takes a deep breath, massages at his eyes, and blows out the breath, “he’s pretty badly hurt. He was hurt *before* he got taken— so the doctors are worried he’s started to heal with misaligned bones. His arms are in rough shape. He’s being set up in temporary casts right now— there's nothing Recovery Girl can do until he rebuilds his stamina. He’s got a mild concussion too; doctors were surprised there wasn’t more damage. The bruising is already starting to heal, but he’ll have the shiner for a couple weeks—or until Recovery Girl gets her hands on him.”

“Has he woken up?”

“Not since you saw him walking,” Shota shakes his head. He rubs at his temples and sighs again. “You kids are going to make me go grey before I hit thirty-five.”

His uncle is quiet for a second until:

“Ow! Hey!” Hitoshi whines as he rubs at the back of his head where Shota had just smacked softly up the backside of his head. “That’s abuse!”

Barely a second passes before he’s tugged into a tight, bordering on suffocating hug to which he can only snort out an exhale, tuck his face in close and enjoy the comfort after *that* shitshow, “I’m getting real mixed signals here, uncle Sho.”

“Yeah, well, I’m using all my restraint to hug you instead of kill you myself,” his uncle offers drily, squeezing him just a little bit tighter as a hand comes up to knot through Hitoshi’s hair, “I hope you know that I am beyond pissed at you; that was just so stupid, Hitoshi. You

all could've died. We didn't know where you were and you weren't answering anyone. We'd already lost one kid, 'toshi, I couldn't stomach losing a second."

"'m sorry, uncle Sho..." Hitoshi breathes out, and he really does mean it. He wouldn't change what he'd done—Izuku and Bakugou were home safe and whoever that wrinkly old villain is has been arrested.

"I know," Shota mumbles into Hitoshi's hair, "just... *shh* for now. Let me get a hug in before you're sentenced to your room for the rest of your life."

"I take it... Mom knows then?" Hitoshi winces.

He supposes that makes sense.

He had snuck out and hadn't returned home last night. He'd ignored his phone— dozens of texts from his parents and a handful from his uncles. He'd shut the device off when the guilt got suffocating. He does feel bad about ignoring them, but he knows if he had of looked at his phone and seen their worry, he might've lost some of his nerve. And if the other student's guardians were called, so were his.

Not to mention his uncle could've ratted him out too.

He's proud of what they'd done. He's proud to have played a part in rescuing his cousin and Bakugou. He's proud to have used his Quirk for something *good*—maybe it's not as evil of a Quirk as he'd been convinced.

"Shinsou Hitoshi!"

And... he no longer feels proud. He's scared. That's an *angry* mom voice.

He hears his mom's furious voice before he even sees her. She's down the hall but it sounds like he's a lot closer. It's funny how both he and his uncle stiffen at her tone—it's not funny, however, that her anger is directed at him and not his uncle.

Shota tugs away from the teenager, even if he really wants to keep holding him. To keep assuring himself that the kid's safe. He knows the boy's in good hands and that he'll be protected.

"Y'know, it was nice knowing you, nephew," his uncle drawls tiredly, but his lips twitch up faintly as he looks over his shoulder to where

the dark-haired woman is rushing towards them, “good luck.”

Definitely not good.

“That’s not funny,” Hitoshi whispers out, genuine a little scared.

As soon as his uncle pulls away entirely, he leaves towards Izuku’s hospital room with a halfhearted wave thrown at Hitoshi. It feels mocking. His uncle is definitely taking pleasure in leaving Hitoshi to fend off his mom.

He’s tugged into another tight embrace before he can even catch his breath.

Hitoshi sees his father standing just a step behind his mother, face furrowed between disappointment and pride. His arms are crossed threateningly over his chest, but besides that, there’s no other tell that he’s disappointed.

Hitoshi chooses to focus on the pride over the disappointment, because he’s not sure he’d be able to handle both parents disappointed at once. And he doesn’t know what the hell his uncle’s feeling, but disappointment is definitely somewhere mixed in there as well.

He’s tense in the hold for just a second before he’s relaxing into her arms. It's his mom, and he really needs a hug. He’d been scared. He’d done something very bad. He’d seen things. Lots of hurt, and blood and fighting, and he knows that’s what Heroics is, but he wasn’t prepared to be dropped head first.

He’d done it to himself, but still, it was a lot to take in.

“I’m so glad you’re alright, baby,” his mother whispers desperately into his hair as she squeezes even tighter. He tucks his head under her chin and squeezes her back.

The anger she’d rushed at him with is replaced with genuine relief, but it doesn’t stick around long.

She pulls away and hold him at arm's length by his shoulder. Her fingers dig into his shoulders in that in between state of comforting and *ow*.

Hitoshi shutters as she stares searchingly into his own face, before her expression is pressed into a sternness he hasn’t seen since he was a child, eyes alit with protective anger, “you are *so* grounded, Hitoshi,

you hear? That was reckless, and stupid and— God, Hitoshi, I could kill you myself right now. I am so mad at you but I'm so glad you're okay. I am so, so glad you're okay, baby. Never. Never again, Hitoshi. Promise me."

"I promise," he mumbles. "I'm sorry."

"I know," she sighs, tugging him back into her and hugging him tight again. "I'm just so glad you're okay, we were so worried. We've been up all night, and Shota said we shouldn't be out looking and that scared the *hell* out of me because we shouldn't be out, but you *were*... "

"I'm sorry."

"We know," his dad offers as he finally steps closer, arms wrapping around the both of them. Hitoshi is comforted by his dad's cologne. "We're proud of you, Hitoshi. You did really good today, even if you did it in the worst way possible. I'm glad you found Izuku, and that was pretty clever what you did—the Detective on the phone told us."

"Oh yeah?" Hitoshi perks up.

"Yep," His dad nods fondly, "you're totally still grounded though. Probably until you're thirty."

"*At least*," His mother chimes in, pressing a kiss to his forehead. Then another. She lifts a hand from his back and cups his cheek, giving a squeeze before pressing another kiss to his cheek. He wrinkles his nose in embarrassment, but doesn't say anything. Any other situation and he'd be fighting back.

Hitoshi wilts as their words sink in. Bummer.

When Shota finally manages to slump his way back to Izuku's hospital room, he's beyond happy to see the kid back in the room, asleep tucked in the hospital bed.

They'd seen Izuku at the ambulance arrival terminal, and then he's been carted off for x-rays, an MRI and to get his arms wrapped in temporary casts until they could overlook the x-rays and decide on something sturdier. It was still a tossup of whether his bones had started healing incorrectly, or if he was okay to just get casted until Recovery Girl could use her Quirk.

Shota prays the kid hasn't started healing yet—that he'll just be in

casts for a couple days while he recuperated and then he'll be healed with a Quirk. The thought of the kid needing a fracture reduction after that—needing his bones to be rebroken so they can be realigned makes Shota queasy.

The kid cannot catch a break.

He'd forced himself to do as was expected of him only since he couldn't be there while Izuku was being treated. They'd taken him away, and it was just something that neither he or Hizashi were allowed to stick around for. Honestly, the distraction of his responsibilities was actually almost *nice*. A way to keep himself busy for a while, knowing the kid was alive and no longer in the clutches of Shigaraki and the League.

Izuku's absence just gave him more time to focus on what needed his attention, and that just so happened to be dealing with his bratty students, including an equally, if not brattier, nephew.

Hizashi had opted to stay in the room Izuku had been assigned in the Hero ward of the hospital. "I wanna be here when he gets brought in, I don't wanna leave him alone, Sho. I *can't.*"

Shota had swallowed down his own emotions and wrapped Hizashi in a hug.

Now, walking into the room to see his husband staring down at the sleeping face of their foster son like he the whole entire world is an image he hopes he never forgets. Hizashi doesn't look up at his arrival. Shota thinks, for a second, that Hizashi didn't hear him, but he spots the hearing aids in his ears and realizes just a second later that he doesn't want to look away from Izuku.

Shota tries to shove down the warmth spreading in his chest as he moves swiftly into the room, taking the seat on Izuku's other side.

Izuku has full arm casts. His fingers are exposed out the end, and Hizashi is thumbing over the kid's knuckles, hand slipped carefully under Izuku's. He's got other bandages too— but his arms are the worst of the damage.

"He looks so small, Shota," Hizashi whispers without looking away. Shota leans forwards, elbows braced on the mattress to gaze over the boy. He does look small. Tiny in the hospital bed. Small and fragile and it hurts his heart to see.

He knows Izuku is a Hero student, even knows he's had worse injuries then this, but there's something about seeing him unconscious in the bed, having not seen him for three days while he'd been held captive that breaks him.

It shouldn't have happened.

Neither of these boys should've been taken. That fight in Kamino Ward shouldn't have happened—they'd only seen bits and piece on the news, but to know Bakugou and Izuku were there? His two fifteen-year-old students? Actually, his *seven* fifteen-year-old students since Hitoshi's little rescue party had been there too.

"He's okay, Hizashi," Shota whispers as he settles his own hand over Izuku's other one. "He'll be okay."

"I hate this," Hizashi cries, "he's just a baby, Sho. He's so hurt. He's *my* baby. *Ours*. Look at him... God, I'm so sorry this happened, Izuku... I don't... I don't know why they're targeting us. Why him? Why your entire class? It sucks, Shota. I hate it."

"I know," Shota whispers as he slips his other hand under Izuku's so the small scarred hand is sandwiched between his. "I'm sorry. I hate it too. None of them deserve this. They're too young, but I don't know how to stop it."

"You keep training them," Hizashi wipes at his eyes behind his glasses, "you can't stop it. *We* can't stop it. They're going to be targets until Shigaraki gets bored and moves onto something else. We *can't* stop that. But you can help them get better. You're a great teacher Shota. I know the news fucked with your head yesterday, but you are. They're learning so much from you. You're helping them protect themselves."

"I hate that I can't always help them." Shota wilts in his seat, "three days, Hizashi. They were gone for almost three days and I couldn't do *anything*."

"That's not your fault," Hizashi shakes his head. "That's not your fault, it's not my fault. It's not their fault. The only one to blame here is Shigaraki. Is the League. They're the bastards who took our kids."

"I want to wring his neck," Shota confesses softly, thumb stroking along the curve of Izuku's hand.

"Join the club," Hizashi laughs quietly. "Let's just be glad he's home

safe, yeah? We can worry about this after he's out of the hospital. Just... focus on him right now. He deserves it."

Shota opens his mouth to agree—

"Da'?"

Shota straightens in his chair, looking down at Izuku's face. His eyes are squinted and he moves faintly like he's searching for something. What's he saying? That sounds a bit like—

"Pah?"

Hizashi sucks in a breath and leans over so Izuku can see him. He lifts his other hand to Izuku's face, thumbing at his freckled cheek before finally speaking, "yeah, baby, we're here. You're okay. We're so glad you're *safe*, sweetheart. You did such a good job..."

Izuku quiets for a second, studying Hizashi calmly. He blinks owlish eyes before looking away, "'ad?"

"Awh, baby," Hizashi sounds like he's about to start crying, "dad's here too, you're okay. He's right there, holding your other hand, yeah? We're both here."

Shota tried not to be startled. It's a little strange to be called *dad*, but at the same time his heart feels full. He's never felt fondness like this. He clears the emotions from his throat, giving the boy's hand a careful squeeze to announce his presence to the child. "You're safe now, Problem Child. We're here."

"'m sorry," Izuku whines softly, fingers twitching in Shota's grip the like kid's trying to hold his hand back, "'idn't mean'ta..."

"We know," Shota swallows roughly. "You're alright. We're not upset, Izuku. We're so happy you're okay. You're going to be just fine, okay?"

Izuku swallows roughly, trying to blink his eyes open even more, "s're?"

"Oh, sweetheart," Hizashi coos, "we're *so* sure. You did so good, such a brave boy."

Izuku gives a hum as his eyes slip shut again, "'m'tired."

"Go to sleep then," Shota tells him softly. He carefully lifts his hand

from Izuku's own hand so he can carefully push back his bangs, "you've had a long day, get some sleep, okay? We'll be right here when you wake up."

"Mm'kay."

Izuku's lost to the world again after that.

The two of them sit in silence, comforted by the soft breaths of the drugged-up boy. They're both processing. That's something you need to process. Shota *definitely* needs to process it.

Logically, Shota knows Izuku is unlikely to remember this. He really is drugged; heavy duty pain relievers being administered via his IV drip, coursing through his body and making him loopy.

But at the same time, it *happened*. Izuku had called him *dad*. He's called Hizashi *Pa*.

"Shota," Hizashi breathes out, voice wrecked. "I am so glad I had my hearing aids in for that."

Shota swallows the lump in his throat, "he won't remember this Hizashi..."

"He called us dad! Well, you dad. But I was *Pa*, how cute it is that?"

"He's running on drugs, 'zashi, he probably won't remember this."

"He won't, but I'll never forget. That sweet little baby. Our baby, he called us his dads. Shota, we're dads. It's official now, we have a son. He's ours, I won't ever be able to give him up."

"Hizashi—"

"I'm serious, Shota, he'll need to be pried from my cold, dead hands if someone tries to take him from us. That's our baby. He's spoken, Sho, he's claimed us. *We're dads*."

Shota sighs, brushing the thumb on the hand that he still hasn't pulled away from the teen's face over his sleep furrowed brow. He's weak. He's already so weak. He's a dad.

"Yeah," Shota can't deny it, expression softening as Izuku's brow relaxes under the gentle ministration. "Guess we are."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if it got a little repetative with the anime at some point— it felt weird just jumping round without including some of the dialogue. I tried not to make it to boring, but, y'know. Only so much you can do.

Anyways! I hope you all liked this update, and I do still have something fun and fluffy planned for the next chapter! Congrats, you've survived the angsty kidnapping arc! Lemme know what you think in the comments! I do really enjoy reading everything you guys have to say, and it's so amazing to see ya'll interacting with this! Makes me happy :)

Also! As a side note, I've started another fic that definitely won't be as long as this one. It's sorta a time-travel fic where Izuku gets sent to an alternate universe where Deku is a feared villain. I'm having a lot of fun with it, but as a warning I'm pretty mean to Midoriya in it :) Still plenty of Dadzawa and there's EraserMic (because I'm *weak*). That one's called When Realities Collide if you're interested in checking it out!

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! We're back for another chapter!

Imma warn you now, this was one of those chapters where I had way to much fun writing and it just got— it got so *big*? It could've probably been split into two different chapters, but you guys deserve a treat after the kidnapping arc :) There's also a few loose ends I needed to clear up from the past couple chapters, so that's here too!

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku isn't very *there* for a while.

He knows he's in the hospital, he remembers, faintly, the kidnapping, Kacchan, and the fight, and All Might and Oboro and that *cloud*—the storm cloud over head, but besides that... it's pretty hazy.

He knows though, that he's in a hospital. For the first time in days, his pain has been blissfully ebbed away, and his arms—well, he can't exactly *feel* them, but a squinted glance down proves they're still there. His brain is foggy, and he honestly can't make heads or tails out of anything around him but he's at a point now that he just he *rolls* with it.

Even when he does wake up, he doesn't feel like he really is awake.

He faintly remembers waking up in a panic. He's alone, and he's not where he had been and he doesn't quite make sense of it. He remembers calling out, but can't for the life of him remember what he'd said— and then there's that breath of relief because he's *not* alone like he'd thought. Shota and Hizashi are there, and they're talking so sweet and soft; he knows they are, can see it in their expressions, even when their words feel like cotton in his ears.

He doesn't stay conscious for long.

The next time he wakes, he's a bit more lucid.

His head is still cottony, and his eyes are blurry and he *feels* drugged

up, but he's not in any pain, so he takes it as a win. He blinks his eyes open, manages to sit up just a bit, enough to survey his surroundings and frowns thoughtfully.

He glances to the side, spotting an empty chair. He blinks owlishly at it, then frowns.

He drags his attention to the other side where he faintly remembers seeing Hizashi at... some point. Hizashi is not there, but Oboro is. He's sitting tensely in the chair, watching something. He's very intently watching something, to the point he doesn't even notice Izuku's awake, or feel the eyes on him.

Izuku doesn't understand the look on his friend's face.

He lets his own attention slide in the direction Oboro's staring, towards the foot of Izuku's hospital bed, and he startles when his gaze finally lands on the child sitting crisscross at the end of the bed. He sucks in a breath of surprise as cat-like eyes stare intently at him, before she manages a little smile.

"Hi," Izuku breathes out, pushing himself up a little more. He's still hazy, but seeing Hana has knocked some clarity into him. "Are you okay?"

"*I* should be asking *you* that, Deku," the little girl's smile wanes and she shifts. "*Are* you okay?"

"Of course I am," Izuku hums instantly, trying not to shift to much. He doesn't feel pain much, but he does feel an uncomfortable pinch in his arms when he jostles them. "Good as new, just like I told you I would be."

"*Good as new?*" Oboro huffs in annoyance, "bold coming from the one in full arm casts."

"Hey." Izuku pouts, attention lulling towards Oboro, who now has his arms laced over his chest and has drawn his attention away from the child and to the teenager. "We both know this is nothin'."

Oboro narrows his eyes, nose wrinkling as he squints unamused at Izuku. He huffs out a breath and lets his attention flick back to the foot of the bed, "so, who's the kid? She refused to talk to me when she came in; just sat on the end of your bed like she knew you or somethin' and watched you sleep. Sorta creepy. This is the first I've heard her talk."

“Deku, is he the ghost friend you told me about?” She shuffles until she’s on her knees and shifts closer like they’re sharing a secret, “the one who helps you?”

Izuku’s eyes dart to Oboro, before he shoots him a teasing smile and leans towards Hana as much as he can in the same position, “he is.”

“Okay, fine,” Oboro sighs heavily, leaning back in his chair, “secrets are good too. I’m only the one person you tell literally *everything* to, but sure, replace me with a new ghost. I see how it is.”

She glances back at Oboro, as if gauging his worth in that way children tend to do— sharp calculating eyes, and lips puckered suspiciously. After a second she comes to a conclusion, and gives slow nod. “You never said anything about how *dramatic* he is.”

Despite the obvious distaste for Oboro, she seems content enough with his presence. She shoots him one last uncertain look before settling calmly at Izuku’s side.

“Hey! Listen here ankle biter—” Oboro squawks in offense that Izuku isn’t sure if it’s real or feigned. The green-haired teen bites back an amused snicker before waving a dismissive hand and shooting his ghost friend a warning glare that has Oboro swallowing down the rest of his words and plopping back against the backrest of the chair in annoyed defeat.

The teen ghost takes a breath and lulls his head in Hana’s direction, cocking his attention between Izuku and the ghost child, “fine. Okay, I get it. But are ya going to, y’know, introduce us, or...?”

“Oh,” Izuku gives a soft laugh, “yeah, right, sorry. Forgot for a second there. This is Hana,” Izuku introduces, then, to Hana, “and Hana, this is Oboro. Hana kept me company while I was with the League and Oboro... he’s a Hero too. He’s helped me a lot.”

“I saw him help you," Hana ducks her head and picks at a thread on the blanket, “when... when Sensei was there. It was really scary, so he *must* really be a Hero too. I couldn’t help you like he did. I’m... I’m sorry.”

Oboro looks taken aback briefly, fore his expression softens in that touched ‘*children can be so cute*’ kinda way. It's a nice look on the ghost. A soft, fond smile.

“Don’t be,” Izuku lulls his head, making sure to soften his voice, “it

wasn't you fault. All the matters is that you tried, right? It really is fine, I mean, sometimes even Oboro and I can't help each other either. It's alright."

Oboro's expression has twisted to one of confusion now, eyebrows furrowing when Izuku glances over, but a quick shake of his head has the ghost biting his bottom lip and keeping quiet.

Hana stares down harder at the blankets, "are you really okay?"

"I will be," Izuku offers calmly, because he knows he doesn't quite look fine yet, but he has high hopes of making a full recovery. "I have my guardians and friends to help me and now that I'm here in the hospital I'll probably be getting help to heal me up real quick. You don't have to worry about me."

"That's... good," the corners of Hana's lips curl into a half smile, "I just wanted to make sure since... since you *weren't* very okay, and then you didn't wake up for a long time and I was *worried*. I had to go with them, but I really was very worried about you. I'm really glad you're okay now and... and I'm sorry for my brother and his friends being so mean..."

Oboro tenses where he's sitting, but Hana doesn't seem to notice. Izuku taps the bed with his fingers just enough to get the ghost's attention before he waves his fingers in a way he hopes will convey that the ghost should keep *quiet* for now.

Answers will come, but not when Hana is here to hear them.

"That's not your fault. I thought we decided we shouldn't be apologizing for things that aren't our fault?" Izuku snorts a laugh, pausing for just a second before: "I think you're *crazy*," he teases.

Hana brightens significantly before her face twists into a playful look of annoyance, "no, *you're* crazy."

The little girl giggles at that and it's really very cute.

He doesn't imagine there's a lot in her life as a ghost that she can giggle at. It hits him like a brick that this little girl had seen the fight against All Might and One for All, that she'd probably seen whatever went down at the bar that had led to the fight.

It makes Izuku feel almost sick to think of someone so young (*technically?*) seeing things like that. And often too. There's no doubt

that the League has been up to more than they know about.

“So, what are you going to do now, Hana?” Izuku asks quietly, and Hana instantly folds in on herself, tugging her knees into her chest. “You know you... you *don’t* have to stay with your brother, right?”

“I know,” she’s picking at the thread again, “I could leave like mom and dad, and grandma and grandpa but... I don’t want to leave him. He’s still my little brother, even if he’s a bad guy. I love him, Deku, I remember him bein’ a little baby when momma brought him home. And we... we all just *left* him alone back then, when he... when...” she sucks in a breath, wiping at her eyes, “he didn’t mean to. Dad was just so mean and... and... I just— I just don’t wanna leave him alone again. I can be a better sister, even if he doesn’t know I’m there, yanno? Besides, we’ve *always* been together; I can’t leave *now*. ‘m sorry.”

Oboro is frowning thoughtfully, but Izuku just manages a light smile.

He can’t say he does know— there still a lot here he doesn’t understand. She hadn’t really touched on anything past the fact that she and Shigaraki were siblings. She hadn’t said how she’d died, but clearly it had been traumatic if the whole family *except* Shigaraki was dead (he can hazard a guess based on what he knows and he has a bad, *bad* feeling about what could’ve happened).

But it really isn’t his place to pry any more than he already has, as much as he *wants* to. He really does think that if he challenges Hana now, she might never come back. He wants her to have someone— even if that someone is just *him*— to fall back on if she needs it.

He knows he probably could; seek information and burn the bridge he’s somehow managed to build, but the thought of *using* this little ghost child makes him feel sick. No matter who her connection to the living world is.

Maybe that’s a mistake, but he’s always followed a certain set of morals when it came to ghosts and he doesn’t intent to change that now.

Plus, he can’t know too much information so suddenly.

People don’t ever believe him when he says he can speak to ghosts.

If he just randomly knows things he shouldn’t, people get nervous, and uncomfortable and they start to assume things— more than once he’d gotten called a *stalker* and a *creeper* because a ghost has wanted

him to pass on a message and it always stings. It's why he doesn't very often pass messages along— its why ghosts have almost... given up on trying to use him.

So, he just nods now.

They stare at each other for a second, and Izuku feels Oboro's gaze on him. He clears his throat and manages a little smile at the child, "remember you can always come find me, if you need me. I'll find a way to help you."

"I know," she brightens slightly, "you're a Hero. If I ever need a Hero, I'll come to you! Yunno, dad always said Heroes weren't good. Always hated when we'd talk about 'em. But... but I think he was *wrong*. You're *really* good, Deku."

It probably shouldn't warm his heart as much as it does to hear her say that. It's not like she, as a ghost, has a lot of options, but it's still nice to hear.

Hana gives him a warm smile before she's slipping off the bed.

She hesitates at his side, looking like she almost wants to try and touch him. He feels bad about trying to get her to touch him back at the bar, and can't help but wonder it didn't work.

Hadn't Oboro used his power right after?

Why could one, but the other couldn't?

"I should probably go now," Hana tells him softly, taking a couple steps backwards towards the door. "My brother is really upset about what happened to Sensei. He... he wasn't very nice to him most of the time, but he was *there*. Always there."

Izuku tries not to let anything show on his face as he nods. "You stay safe, okay?"

"I will," she scoffs with child-like attitude. Her arms lace over her chest and she shoots him an unimpressed look that he can't help but find adorable. She pauses, looking back at him hesitantly, "you... um, you too. *Please*. Just in case— um, in case I need you, because you wouldn't be a very good hero as a ghost, yunno? So, um, stay safe."

"I'll try," Izuku laughs. He can't help it when his smile widens as Hana's roundabout way of showing she cares. It's cute, honestly. Even

if she scowls and huffs when she notices the smile. “See you around, Hana.”

“Bye,” She pouts, turning and leaving through the wall without waiting for a response.

Izuku lets his eyes slip shut, body suddenly feeling heavy. The drugs are clouding his mind again, but he’s not sure if he managed to shove the affects down for Hana’s sake, or if another round had been set to slowly administer. “Where’re Sho an’ ‘zashi?”

“Cafeteria,” Oboro tells him easily, reclining back in the hospital chair as much as the cheap plastic will allow. “Doctors didn’t think you’d be up for a couple more hours, so Shota went for coffee, and then Hizashi decided that they both needed real food, so ‘zashi’s probably trying to force Sho into picking something *real* to eat. I thought about going too, but I didn’t wanna leave you alone in case you woke up, and then *Hana* showed up and I didn’t like the way the random creepy ghost child was just *staring* at you without saying anything.”

“Ah, okay,” Izuku hums distantly. He tries to order his thoughts around as he dissects Oboro’s words. He frowns to himself without opening his eyes, “she’s not creepy, I just think she’s uh... she’s just a bit mistrusting. And so ’re you *Mr. Judgement*— y'know someone could, theoretically, call *you* a creepy ghost as well.”

“That’s just rude,” Oboro pouts. “I thought we were besties.”

Izuku snorts a laugh without opening his eyes. He feels like he’s drifting, or, starting to drift off.

It’s a pleasant feeling.

“So, uh,” Izuku forces himself to blink tired, hazy eyes open and turns his head towards Oboro, “I don’t think anyone answered my question of *who that child actually was*?”

“Oh,” Izuku hums as a fuzzy feeling slowly crawls through his mind. “Shigaraki’s sister.”

Izuku loses his battle with trying to stay conscious, letting the fluffy numbness carry him away.

“Hang on, *Shigaraki’s what now*? Hey, dude, wait a second! You-you *can’t* just drop something like that and then pass out! Izuku!”

The next time Izuku wakes up, his mind feels a little clearer.

He blinks his eyes open and stares up at the ceiling for a long while. His eyes still feel heavy, but he's at the point where his body thinks it's been asleep for too long, so even when he tries to shut his eyes and go back to sleep, he just can't manage to.

Like the first time he woke up, he lets his head lull to the side to take stock of the room.

He first spots Shota, asleep in one of the hard hospital chairs. He's contorted so he's curled up in the chair, elbow on the armrest and his jaw cupped in his palm. His breathing is evened in that way it never really is in class— Shota has crashed.

Izuku doesn't dare think about how long his guardian has been awake worried about him. He realizes quickly that he just feels bad and guilty when he does that. He tries to remind himself it's not his fault, but then he sees them in the states they're in and he *knows* if it wasn't for him, they wouldn't be as drained and exhausted.

That's a bad train of thought though.

A sweater is draped over Shota, one of Hizashi's, Izuku is almost positive. He lets a small smile curl onto his lips at the thought; no doubt Hizashi draped it over him when he was finally asleep.

Shota looks *exhausted*, so Izuku's glad he's asleep.

He glances next to the foot of the bed—or, Oboro sitting crisscross at the foot of his bed catches his attention as he scans his gaze to check who's in the other chair. Oboro offers a grin and a tiny wave, but he doesn't say anything.

Izuku takes that for what it is and doesn't greet the ghost in return.

The reason for the surprisingly friendly silent treatment is sitting on the chair to Izuku's right.

Hizashi isn't asleep like Shota, and is instead watching Izuku with such a gentle fondness it almost makes the teen want to squirm. He's in his civilian clothes, with his hair tied up in a loose bun. He's wearing the red-framed glasses and Izuku spots his hearing aids too.

He looks tired as well, but a bit more rested than Shota does.

“Hey... looks who’s up,” Hizashi croons quietly, reaching out to stroke Izuku’s bangs out of his face. Izuku knows he leans into the touch like a cat, but Hizashi just smiles tenderly. “How’re you feeling, sweetheart?”

It’s soft and domestic, and Izuku isn’t quite sure what’s suddenly changed because that’s such a soft gesture.

He can’t remember the last time someone did that to him, and he’s not entirely used to feeling safe and soft and *protected*, but something has obviously prompted this because Oboro has a *shit-eating grin* when he glances over, and Hizashi hasn’t stopped looking at him like *that*.

It takes Izuku a second to remember how to move his lips, and an additional second to make his voice work. He clears his throat quietly, “b-better, um, it’s nice to not hurt anymore. I can’t really... feel my arms right now, but it’s better than *feeling* them.”

Hizashi’s face twists into something of devastation, but it’s gone almost as fast as it appeared. If Izuku were a little less groggy he’d probably pick the expression apart, but he’s still not sure he’s really thinking completely clear.

The man gives a soft hum, “I’m happy to hear that, Sunshine. I’m glad you’re not hurting like that anymore. You had us so worried, and we’re very glad you’re back safe and sound. Sho and I are so proud of you, you know that, right?”

“You are?” Izuku wrinkles his nose and scrunches his shoulder up in a way that borders on painful.

“So proud,” Hizashi nods seriously. His hand slides softly down the side of his face, and his thumb ghosts over Izuku’s freckled cheek before dropping to help ease Izuku’s shoulder back down. The teen has to physically stop himself from shivering at the contact. “You scared the *hell* outta us at camp, Kiddo, but you were so brave, and smart and *badass*—”

“Badass?” Izuku squeaks, just knowing his cheeks are flushing at the unexpected compliment. He’s not sure he’s ever been called badass before—and by *Hizashi* as well.

“Definitely badass,” Hizashi laughs, “y’know, Kota told Sho all about what you did to protect him; how you just kept going to keep him safe. He really looks up to you now, Kiddo. And your friends said the same thing. My poor heart can’t take seeing you like this, but I know

you did what you had to do, and I'm *so* proud of you for protecting Kota and you classmates—though I do wish you coulda done it without breaking both your arms and getting kidnapped, but I know that's unrealistic."

Hizashi has set his hand over Izuku's, thumb drawing a line along where the cotton cast ends, "you'll be such a great Hero— when you *graduate*, of course, because I will literally *bubble wrap* you the next time you decide to run headfirst into a one-way portal to a villain's lair with two broken arms, ya'dig?"

"I don't plan on making it a habit," Izuku snorts a laugh, lulling his head completely in Hizashi's direction where the man smiles, appreciating the joke. "So, if it does happen a second time, I consent to the bubble wrap. Sounds sorta fun."

"Don't tempt me," Hizashi gives a bright laugh and Shota stirs slightly, but doesn't wake. Hizashi glances over, expression softening even more before he looks back at Izuku, "but seriously, Sunshine, you'll be an amazing Hero, I just *know* it."

"He's such a sap," Oboro chimes from the foot of the bed, and Izuku lets just his eyes flick towards him. Hizashi definitely is being pretty sappy— but why? Why now? "Man, I really do *wonder* why he's suddenly so smitten with you?"

The ghost definitely knows something.

"Thank you," Izuku forces himself to say through the warmth in his chest, head bowing slightly, "it... it really means a lot coming from you, 'zashi."

Hizashi wilts slightly, pouting for a split second before he's perking up to his usual self, just still somehow slightly softer, "I mean it, kiddo. I think *Deku* is just what the world needs, even if I still don't completely *like* your chosen name. And I still think that Quirk of yours needs some major work with how it still harms your body. We can work on it though."

Oboro is full on cackling now, to the point his eyes are watering and he's dragging laughter-shaken hands down his eyes and cheeks. Izuku doesn't know what's so funny, but he has half a mind to kick the ghost in the thigh for whatever it is he's not telling him. Too bad he doesn't want to accidentally touch him. Not now.

"I still need a lot of practice," Izuku agrees as he tries to ignore the

now fading laughter. He can't wait until he's alone with the ghost and can strangle him in peace. And answers would be nice too. "Is... is everyone okay? Kota, and Kacchan? My classmates? *All Might*?"

Hizashi hesitates for no longer then a second before nodding, "your classmates are all okay."

Izuku wrinkles his nose at the simple answer, and Hizashi laughs before continuing quietly, "what do you remember about the attack?"

"There was... lots of villains," Izuku offers after a moment of thought, "I fought a villain who could regenerate his muscles and... and wasn't there a gas Quirk? A-and I remember seeing fire. And— Shoji got pretty hurt too, right?"

"Firstly, Kota is just fine thanks to you, so don't worry about him, alight?" Hizashi tilts his head with a small smile. "Everyone's doing well—most of the students have been discharged at this point. There was a vapor Quirk, and it did knock students out, but there was no lasting damage to anyone's lungs or heads when they woke up. Some students did get hurt, like Shoji, but everyone's been healed up; I assume it's no surprise to hear that *you* had the worst injuries of the bunch— I mean, the villain you took out?"

"Sheesh," Hizashi lets out a low whistle in that impressed sort of way, "big guy, that one. I only saw his photo on the news when his arrest was announced. The police have been after him for a while but his Quirk is... it's something else. I'm terrified just thinkin' about you in that fight, sweetheart."

Izuku gives a nod, wincing subconsciously as he thinks about how close to dying he'd come.

He probably wouldn't have made it out of that fight without Kota and Oboro. He'll have to thank the little boy the next time he sees him. Izuku chances a quick look at his ghost, only to find Oboro watching them with a mournful look.

"Anyways, uh, Katsuki was admitted to the hospital too. He broke a couple ribs somewhere along the line, and he was fairly dehydrated, but he should be getting discharged soon. All Might... well, he's okay but... I think you should probably talk to him. I don't know much; his care is pretty confidential but he *is* okay. So is your internship mentor. He's up and moving, even against doctor's orders."

"Gran Torino was there?" Izuku blinks in surprise. He doesn't

remember that...

“A lot of Heroes were there,” Hizashi offers solemnly, “a lot of Heroes got hurt. That villain they captured... he was really dangerous, Sunshine. Shigaraki and the League got away, but thankfully we got you two back and Tsukauchi believes the villain they did catch was the mastermind behind the League. Shigaraki’s mentor.”

“Wait— they *captured* him?” Izuku jolts up shock, “really?”

He looks towards Oboro, who *knows*, and can’t help the way his heart skips a beat when the ghost gives a tiny smile and a nod. All for One was arrested. Thank God. What Hana had been saying earlier made sense now— Sensei being gone and Shigaraki being upset.

“He’s already secured in Tartarus,” Hizashi tells him softly, brushing finger through Izuku’s hair again. “He won’t hurt you again, ‘zuku.”

“I— t-that’s... that’s good,” Izuku breathes out, relaxing back into his pillows, “I heard he was really, *really* bad. I didn’t um, I don’t remember a lot, but I do remember seeing All Might fighting him... he looked strong. Strong like All Might...”

“It was a crazy fight,” Hizashi agrees thoughtfully, “we only really saw the tail-end of the fight on the news— I don’t know if you saw it, but a huge storm cloud obstructed the helicopter trying to report the fight for most of it. We’ve never seen a storm like that—it was just suddenly there and then it was suddenly *gone*.”

Izuku sucks in a hopefully unnoticeable breath and shoots his gaze to Oboro, who looks almost guilty despite the fact he’d basically saved the day with his Quirk.

“R-really?”

“Oh yeah,” Hizashi nods, “meteorologists still have no idea how it happened. A phenomenon. There’s been loads of speculation, but no one has any idea what really happened.”

Izuku breaths out something that he thinks sounds a bit like a ‘*huh*’ but he can’t wrap his head around the cloud Oboro had made. There’s no doubt at all that it was Oboro. He’d made a *storm cloud*. How’d he do that?

He faintly remembers Oboro admitting that he’d never done anything like that.

Izuku shifts so he can scratch his cheek against his shoulder, pushing down the questions he has for now. “That’s... um, weird.”

“Definitely,” Hizashi agrees with a light laugh. “Anyways, there’s no point in worrying about a weird storm though, you should be focused on building up your stamina—the sooner you do that, the sooner we can bring you home, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Izuku smiles fondly. “I miss the cats.”

“And they miss you!” Hizashi promises, “I’ve been dropping by to check on ‘em. Nemuri’s had them at her place with Sushi while we’ve been here with you, and Nemo, if you can imagine *hates* it. Just as a warning, we’re all gonna be mauled by the cats when we’re home and you'll get the worst of it because they absolutely hate the smell of antiseptic— y’know, after the USJ, Nemo didn’t get off of Shota’s lap for nine hours straight when he was released.”

“Really?” Izuku smiles lightly thinking of Shota, more bandage than man at the point being crowded by three cats who refuse to leave him alone. Probably his happy place, honestly.

“Uh huh,” Hizashi nods theatrically, “he was so in his element; purring cats all around him. He was probably happier there after almost *dying* but being the cat’s center of attention until those bandages came off then he was when we got *married*. It was *adorable*, but you can’t tell him I said that.”

Oboro snickers behind his hand, eyes flicking towards Shota fondly, “that’s probably true, actually.”

Izuku can’t help the laugh he lets out—wishing faintly he too could hide it behind a hand. He’s not sure he’d be able to, even if he tried. His arms feel like anvils.

“I also really want to sleep in my bed, with my blankets. I... is it weird that I miss the cat stuffed toy Shota got me when you guys first took me in? Makes me feel sorta childish missing something like that but... I do.”

“Not at all,” Hizashi shakes his head, once again petting Izuku’s curls back, “it’s a comfort item, and there’s nothing wrong with that. You’re allowed to be a kid, sweetheart. You *are* a kid. I’m sorry we didn’t think to bring it for you. I’ll tell you what though, why don’t I ask Nem to bring it in when she comes by to drop off some clothes for us?”

“Really?” That fondness is swirling in his chest again.

“Really,” Hizashi confirms with a fond seriousness. “Anything that’ll make your time stuck in this boring place a little more bearable is totally worth it, ya’dig? I have a feeling the doctors around here’ll wanna keep you a few more days, and you know how Recovery Girl is when it comes to stuff like this.”

Izuku laughs again, nodding his head in agreement.

He settles down as Hizashi’s fingers continue to card through his hair. It feels nice. “Does everyone know that Kacchan and I are alright? Does... does Hitoshi know I’m okay?”

“They do,” the fingers pause, before starting up again, “he does.”

“Do you think he’ll want to come and visit me?”

“Hitoshi won’t be seeing the light of day for a very long time,” comes a dry snort from Izuku’s other side. He glances over quickly to see Shota awake, stretching out his back before his expression softens, “how’re you feeling, Problem Child?”

“Better,” Izuku offers with a crooked smile, “I can’t really feel my arms, but it’s okay.”

“That’s just the pain medication,” Shota tells him, hunching forwards slightly so his elbows are on the edge of Izuku’s bed, “they have you on some pretty heavy-duty stuff until your stamina’s recharged enough for Recovery Girl to try’n mend you up.”

“Oh,” Izuku hums, and it makes sense. He probably should’ve thought of that. “What happened to Hitoshi?”

“Hitoshi,” Shota slumps down further, voice balanced between exasperation and annoyance, “decided it would be a good idea to join up with a couple of your classmates and play vigilante. They attempted a rescue mission for you and Bakugou.”

“He *what*?” Izuku gapes.

Oboro squirms uncomfortably at the end of the bed and Izuku tries very hard not to let his attention snap in his direction. That was a *guilty* squirm. An accusing growl of ‘*what did you do?*’ sits on the tip of his tongue, but he swallows it down.

“Is... are they okay?”

“No one was hurt,” Shota sighs heavily, like the whole ordeal had aged him ten years, “but they could’ve been. It was dangerous, and reckless and I still haven’t decided on a punishment for your peers. Iida and Todoroki should’ve known better after Hosu.”

Izuku’s mind is going a mile a minute as the information sinks in— so much could’ve gone *wrong* with that. They’d put themselves somewhere they shouldn’t have been, but at the same time... he knows he probably would’ve found a way to get to Kacchan too if he hadn’t of managed to be there with him. He’d done the same thing in Hosu with Iida and Todoroki so he really doesn’t have much room to say anything.

But still, the League and Shigaraki and *All for One* are dangerous. You do not want to be on their radar, Izuku has long since learned *that* the hard way after all his run-ins with the decay-Quirked villain.

“Will... d-does Shigaraki know they were there? Do you think that they’re... targets now? He... he’ll be mad that All for One was taken into custody—”

“Well,” Shota drags his fingers back through his hair and sits up, “as far as we believe, none of the villains were aware they were there. By the time we had a visual of the fight, Shigaraki and his followers were gone. And, All Might didn’t even *know* they were there until Hitoshi announced himself and used his Quirk on the villain. I still don’t know whether to throttle him, or be proud.”

And hang on— *what*? Hitoshi used brainwashing on All for One? Hitoshi brainwashed the strongest villain Japan has ever seen? Hitoshi was not only there, but also illegally used his Quirk to gain control of the situation— of the *fight*?

“W-” Izuku mouth feels dry as he lets his eyes flick to solemn looking Oboro. It’s all the confirmation that what Shota is saying it true. Oboro would’ve been there, would’ve seen it all play out. “Hitoshi did *what*?”

“My response exactly,” Shota huffs drily.

“It was really cool,” Oboro offers when Shota and Hizashi share a look between them, “’toshi made him get on his knees and then put his hands behind his head until All Might arrested him. It was just All Might and All for One there— *I* didn’t even know the students stuck

around.”

“Is Hitoshi in trouble?”

“Honestly,” Shota cracks a tiny smile, “I don’t think Hitoshi will be *un-grounded* until he graduates.”

“I—” he can’t help but laugh in surprise, “I-I mean like… um, *real* trouble. As scary as *parent* trouble is. Like, um, *legal* trouble, for, um, for the Quirk usage?”

“I don’t know,” Shota shrugs with a tight expression of poorly hidden worry. “It’s… Yagi hasn’t made an *official* statement yet. There… aren’t really signs that Hitoshi was there. No audio on the news coverage broadcasted of the fight, and you didn’t see any of the *student rescue party* until after the fight finished. We do know Hitoshi used his Quirk —he told Tsukauchi, and All Might mentioned it briefly when we saw him before he was taken away to get fixed up but… the public doesn’t. I don’t know what All Might plans to say about how the villain just… *submitted*.”

Shota hesitates, head falling back so he’s staring up at the ceiling, “he could be truthful and say Hitoshi was there— and we can’t fault him for that. It's the *truth* and Hitoshi has to live the consequences of his own actions, but… he could also keep quiet and protect Hitoshi. There can’t be any charges laid on him without someone placing him at the scene and reporting the Quirk usage. Hitoshi isn’t seen at any point on the news, and without the audio, there’s no actual proof of illegal Quirk usage.”

“So… he might not be in trouble?”

“Oh, he’s *definitely* in trouble,” Hizashi shakes his head. “*We* know he used his Quirk, and Principal Nezu knows. All Might knows, and Detective Tsukauchi knows too. He *did* use his Quirk, and he *was* there, but it won’t be publicized unless it’s *made* publicized. That’s Hitoshi’s only saving grace in this situation.”

“It’s like when you, Todoroki and Iida fought Stain,” Shota adds, “it was covered up to save both your reputations as Hero trainees, as well as the school’s, thankfully, but you were still in trouble. You still had consequences. I just… can’t defend him with this. He did help, but he did do it illegally no matter his intentions. So… whatever Yagi chooses to do, that’s what Hitoshi will have to live with.”

“That doesn’t seem fair,” Izuku argues without arguing. He’s more

like... stating a fact instead of arguing. He's not sure why he's more upset with Hitoshi's punishment now then he had been with his own back during their internships. Maybe because it's *All for One*. "The villain is in custody now—Hitoshi helped; he shouldn't be in trouble."

"We know," Hizashi smiles sadly, "but that's not how the world works. It's the Commision's world and we all just live in it, ya'dig? We just have to wait and see, Kiddo. All Might's taking a couple days to recover and then he'll make his statement with Tsukauchi."

"I think All Might will cover for him," Oboro offers calmly from the foot of the bed, and Izuku startles having almost forgotten the ghost was around. The ghost has his knees drawn up to his chest, not looking at Izuku as he speaks, "you didn't see the fight, man, All Might was *struggling*. I don't know if he would've won if Hitoshi hadn't..."

Oboro wavers off before shaking his head and glancing thoughtfully at Izuku, "if he's smart, he'll cover for Hitoshi. I mean a Quirk like brainwash getting leaked to the public— the world seeing what Hitoshi can actually do with the element of surprise? It's *useful*. It's *scary*."

Izuku gives the faintest of nods as he lets Oboro's words sink in. It's all true. He just really hopes All Might will come up with some kind of excuse and leave Hitoshi and his Quirk out of it.

Izuku wonders if All Might will come see him before speaking to the police official. He's got a feeling Detective Tsukauchi already knows what's going on, but the rest of the world probably doesn't. Tsukauchi knows about One for All, so he obviously knows about the threat of All for One too.

He also wonders if they'll be more likely to keep Hitoshi out of the statement because it's an All for One and One for All matter. Izuku has no idea what the Commission knows about that stuff, but he can only hope that the identity of villain Hitoshi helped take out will keep his name clear.

"I hope All Might protects him," Izuku finally whispers, and he really, really does.

"Yeah," Shota sighs, "same here."

It's quiet for a while after that. Shota has slumped back in his chair with his eyes shut, but he's not really asleep. Not completely.

Hizashi has gone to text Nemuri about the stuffed cat and to pick up some food from the cafeteria.

Izuku settles into the silence and takes the time to rest his own eyes. He's still not feeling actual sleep, but he is exhausted. He really hopes the drugs knock him out again soon because he does feel tired.

It's not long until there's commotion in the hall, and Izuku almost wilts when he recognizes said commotion. Oh no.

"Kat," Izuku hears Auntie Mitsuki hiss over loud stomping footsteps, "you can't just storm into someone's hospital room!"

"I've been discharged!" comes a terse reply, "and it's 'zuku— the fuck you mean I can't just walk in. We've known him since he was in *diapers*— he and I've shared *baths*, Hag, I'm going to check on him. I played your shitty waiting game; I gave him *time*. Just let me check on the stupid nerd and then we'll get the hell outta here."

"Katsuki," Auntie's voice warns, "where the hell're your manners you *brat*? We both know that 'zuku's got foster parents now! They don't know us, and they won't *appreciate* you shovin' your way in like you were raised in a barn! We *can't* just barge in anymore; that's not Inko in there we can't just—"

"Screw off!" Kacchan snaps and Izuku can imagine him waving his mother off, "just try'n stop me."

"Well," Izuku squints his own eyes open to see Shota reclined in his chair, head cocked just enough to be able to stare at the slightly ajar door. He already looks amused. "This'll be fun."

There's no doubt Shota heard everything between Kacchan and his mother too.

The footsteps come to a pause just outside Izuku's door, and there's heated whispers like Kacchan and his mother are squaring off almost face to face, arguing under their breathes. He bites back a laugh.

Shota inclines his head a bit more to try and spot them through the gap.

Then, the door is being nudged open and Kacchan is pushing his way in, "hey, Nerd—"

And he freezes.

Kacchan's eyes are on Shota, and Shota is watching back calmly, almost daring Kacchan to say something. He's smart enough not to though. Actually, Izuku's not even sure his childhood friend can even *form* words past the surprise in his expression.

Mitsuki follows in after her son when the teen freezes abruptly and cuts himself off, her own calculating gaze narrowing suspiciously as she steps past Kacchan.

Her eyes single in on Izuku first, scanning over him protectively before flitting dangerously to Shota. She meets his eyes for a long second before exhaling.

"Oh," she lets her expression lose some of the tension, "you must be Izuku's other foster dad then."

"I am," Shota offers calmly, sitting up straighter. "And you are?"

Auntie hums, eyeing Shota critically.

When she comes to a decision about his character she steps further into the room, leaving a confusion struck Kacchan stood unmoving in the doorway.

Auntie clears her throat, arms crossing over her chest in a resting position, "we haven't met yet, but I did meet your husband just after the Sports Festival when Izuku-kun came over to our house— I'm Bakugou Mitsuki; this gremlin's mother. 'zuku's mother and I were good friends."

"I remember Hizashi mentioning you," Shota bows his head in a nod, "I'm—"

"*Aizawa-Sensei*?" Kacchan finally finds his voice, staring in shock. His wide eyes dart towards Izuku, flicking between the boy in the bed and the man at his bedside before settling on Izuku once again. "What the actual fuck is going on here? Izuku, what the fuck is this? Your foster dad? Aizawa-Sensei? Your foster dad *is* Aizawa-Sensei? Aizawa-Sensei is *married*? Fuck off, you can't be serious. Tell me you're fuckin' joking."

"Um," Izuku shrugs as best he can, "sorry?"

"Aizawa-Sensei, huh? So you're the famous homeroom teacher who almost died protecting these brats," Mitsuki accuses lightly, the remainder of the tension in her stance bleeding out. She'd deemed him

safe, just like she had when she'd met Hizashi.

Shota's brows furrow almost unnoticeable before he ducks his head in a suspicious nod.

"Thank you," she bows, and Shota looks almost mortified, "thank you for protecting them. For protecting my *hot-headed* son. My husband and I are very grateful for everything you've done for our little boy since the start of the school year. I know he's a *pain*, but thank you for keeping him safe."

"*Eh?*" Kacchan growls, scowling at his mother.

Mitsuki returns the scowl and the two just glare at each other. Shota looks completely out of his element, even after being so smug before they'd entered the room. He probably didn't even *think* about the possibility that Kacchan may very well be the spitting image of his mother, with a mirroring attitude to boot. Izuku almost feels bad he didn't warn him, but then again... neither did Hizashi.

"Auntie," Izuku calls quietly, saving Shota from having to formulate a response to someone like Kacchan's mother genuinely thanking him. Izuku isn't sure he really gets a lot of gratitude, especially since he's underground. "What are you guys doing here?"

"Kat was *begging* to come make sure you're alright. The lil' shit was more antsy then ever whining to come see how you were feeling. I haven't gotten a moment of peace since the brat woke up." Mitsuki drags her attention away from Shota to move to Izuku's bedside, eyes carefully scanning over the wounds. "How *are* you feeling?"

Kacchan shake himself from his stupor so he can whip towards his mother with a vicious snarl of '*Hah?*'. He sounds offended that she'd say something like that, even if Izuku had heard Kacchan in the hallway. Showing emotion had never been his strong suit.

Mitsuki pays her son no mind as a deep frown settles on her face. Her eyebrows knit together as she looks over the damage—two full arm casts is pretty awful to look at. The last time she'd really looked at him like this was when he'd taken a header off the public playground slide on one of those many occasions his mother was working and Auntie was stuck watching him. He doesn't think he could've been older than three at the time.

He vividly remembers her panic, even if he was only a toddler. It's there now too, but nowhere near as wild. It's more concern now.

“I’m feeling a lot better,” Izuku tells her honestly. He doesn’t like her being worried about him.

Shota at his side hides a snort of almost disbelief behind his hand, eyeing Izuku thoughtfully.

“Glad to hear that, Kiddo. You always were a tough little thing; even when you were lookin’ up at me all teary-eyed, always promising me that it didn’t hurt and that you were okay.” Auntie reaches down to pat at his blanket covered foot, lip caught between her teeth as she scans over his arms again like she just can’t believe it, “jeez, though, someone really did a number on you, didn’t they?”

He manages a small nod, feeling small being the only one stuck in the bed. It’s different then when it had just been him and his guardians in the room.

“Yeah,” Izuku winces, “but everyone’s okay now, and that’s what matters.”

“I’m glad you haven’t changed, ‘zuku.” Auntie gives him a soft smile, “I still wish my little Kat had *half* as good an attitude as you. I always thought your mother lucked out— don’t you give me that *look*, Katsuki, we both know Izuku’s a *sweetheart* and you’re far too much like *me*. God, I don’t know how your father survives with the two of us around.”

“Whatever,” Kacchan grits his teeth, but doesn’t look overly offended. He still sneers back at her with his arms crossed over his chest. It’s softer than the sneer he shoots their classmates; almost playful. Or, as playful as Kacchan gets, “you’re letting the fact you have a *favorite* child show again, Hag.”

“Knock it off,” Auntie scoffs lightly, striding towards Kacchan to throw an arm over his shoulders and tug him close. She’s being gentler than usual, cautious of his injuries, “you’re my baby boy, and you *know* it, you little jerk. You know I love you.”

“I will throw myself out the window,” Kacchan snarls, but there’s no really heat to it. He grits his teeth and glares towards the window like he’s seriously considering his threat. He’s not.

Izuku shakes his head at their antics—it's very familiar.

He’s glad they haven’t changed much either.

Shota is watching the exchange thoughtfully, studying Kacchan and his mother with eyes of a Pro and a teacher. Izuku wonders what he's thinking, but wouldn't dare to ask. The Bakugou's haven't seemed to notice the studying glint in the underground Hero's eyes.

Shota goes to open his mouth, but is promptly quieted by the door squeaking open. Everyone turns to see who's coming in.

"Hey, Kiddo—" Hizashi steps into the room, pausing for a second to blink at the Bakugous before smiling widely, "Bakugou-San! It's been a while! Did you come around to check on Izuku?"

"Yamada-San," Auntie greets back with a small smile, "yes, we were just—"

"Yamada— *Present Mic*?" Kacchan all but wheezes, before he's whirling around to glare daggers at Izuku. Izuku just gives a nervous grin and attempts to lift his shoulders in a shrug. He doesn't get very far. "Aizawa-Sensei and Mic-Sensei—Fuck, Nerd, anymore secrets?"

"Uh," Izuku shakes his head, "um, that about covers it?"

Kacchan narrows his eyes as Shota and Hizashi stifle their laughter.

"Hang on, Present Mic?" Auntie's grin widens, "now *you*, I know— no offense, Aizawa-San. These two were absolutely obsessed with you when they were knee high; they used to whine and *plead* until I'd let them stay up to listen to your radio show on the weekend. Probably your two biggest fans right here."

Hizashi grins widely, looking genuinely touched.

He glances between Izuku and Kacchan, where his grin sharpens and Izuku just knows he's in for some teasing. He should've expected Auntie to take any opportunity she could to embarrass Kacchan, and Izuku's just along for the ride.

"What the fuck?" Kacchan seethes, turning to his mother with clenched fists. "You can't just fuckin' say things like that, Hag, I see him every day in class!"

"It's no big deal," Mitsuki rolls her eyes, "you two were adorable. That Hero worship—I swear, all I ever heard about was All Might this and Present Mic that. Those matching onesies you two always wore—I have so many cute pictures!"

“Shut the hell up!”

Izuku agrees with the sentiment from Kacchan, knowing a flush is crawling up his face—probably to the tips of his ears. He wishes more than anything he could hide his embarrassment in his hands, but they’re still useless at his sides, so he suffers instead.

“I would love to see those photos!" Hizashi chirps, shooting Auntie his ‘Present Mic’ grin.

This is the sort of embarrassment you’ll never live down.

Izuku’s just glad Hizashi hadn’t walked into the room with Izuku’s stuffed cat. Then he’d never live down the cooing from Auntie and Kacchan’s teasing.

Talk about *mortifying*.

Izuku is in the hospital for four more days after the day he actually wakes it. He’s in the hospital just under a week from arrival to being discharged.

The second day after he wakes up is when All Might finally releases his statement to the world. It’s a breath of relief that he leaves Hitoshi’s name and Quirk out of it. So by all accounts, Hitoshi *wasn’t* even on scene until the fight was finished, which doesn’t mean he’ll get off scot-free. He was still somewhere he wasn’t supposed to be, so he’ll be getting punished for it just the same as Izuku’s classmates.

The statement reports a known and trusted, but *nameless*, underground Hero using their Quirk to take control of the Villain’s arms and legs, like a marionette puppet, until All Might could arrest him. There’s no further detail of the Quirk, which isn’t odd if the nameless Pro they’re using as a scapegoat is underground.

Izuku doesn’t know if a Quirk like that actually exists somewhere, but it sounds really cool.

Still, it’s believable, and matches up with what Izuku had seen on the news rerun that he’d watched on tv. He’s so grateful that All Might really did cover for Hitoshi’s bold and illegal move, because it really could’ve ended badly for him— even though he did help in taking down All for One, that doesn’t amount to much in the eyes of the Commision if it's done illegally.

Izuku really does *get* the need to help, and moving before you really think about it, but it's awful watching it happen to someone else. For doing something good. All for One was a threat, and Hitoshi apprehended him without violence. What an *amazing* Quirk.

Izuku hadn't had much for company in the hospital over those four days.

Shota and Hizashi are usually always in the room, or one of them usually is, at least. He sees doctors and nurses who come in and out, and a couple Pros drop in— like Gran Torino and All Might after they're both fixed up too.

He doesn't see hide nor hair of his classmates, but he assumes that's because Shota told them Izuku couldn't have visitors. He's a little sad he doesn't see his peers, but he's glad that he doesn't have to explain his parental situation to anyone else just yet.

He doesn't see Hitoshi, which sorta sucks, but he assumes the other teen is already stuck in grounding isolation. Shota himself had seemed pretty upset, and from the few times Izuku's met the man's sister, she'd seemed a little protective for obvious brother and son choosing a dangerous career reasons.

What's surprising is that fact that Kacchan had come back to visit once again; showing up alone and out of the blue. He picks the exact moment when Shota's gone to Yuuei to sort some stuff out with Nezu-Sensei, and Hizashi has stepped out for a call.

The ashy-haired teen had mostly just wanted to grill Izuku about his foster parents, which Izuku totally understands. He's honestly excited there's someone else he can talk to— someone who's not a ghost, or the nephew of his foster fathers. It's actually a fairly nice conversation with Kacchan. He hadn't even yelled once.

It had been civil enough of a conversation that when Hizashi returned, peeking into the room without actually opening pushing the ajar door open and announcing himself, he'd surveyed over them, send Izuku a questioning look when they'd caught eyes and then stepped away after deeming Kacchan calm enough to be left alone.

There's been another subtle change in how Kacchan's acting, and Izuku thinks he likes it.

The lack of visitors is probably a good thing, considering he spends a lot of time sleeping and recharging. He sleeps continuously for two

full days straight, almost. He sleeps, wakes to eat what's been delivered for mealtime, tries to keep himself coherent enough to converse with his guardians and ghost friend for a while before ultimately succumbing to the exhaustion and drugs all over again.

The third day is when Recovery Girl deems him well rested enough for her Quirk.

It's not as simple as a kiss to the forehead though.

His arms had started to heal on their own, so before she can mend the breaks, they need to be aligned. It makes sense in a gruesome sort of way, but that doesn't mean he's not anxious to have his bones broken all over again.

He's taken to surgery for that though, and put under general anesthetics. It's a fairly simple procedure, over in a couple hours tops. And once it's done, his arms will be mostly healed via Quirk. He's sent to the recovery room with two freshly bandaged arms and a linger Quirk-kiss on the forehead.

It takes almost all of his stamina to heal his two arms to about 90%, so he sleeps for the rest of the third day, and late into the fourth. He's told he wakes up a couple times, but he doesn't remember a thing.

Finally, the evening of the fourth day, he gets released into Shota and Hizashi's care— arms casted for another week while he finishes healing, but he can now feel them and the pain is almost entirely gone.

He sleeps in his own bed that night, with all three cats (four if you count the plush clutched to his chest) sprawled around him and a ghost keeping watch.

July, as it turns out, is the month of birthdays.

It's Hitoshi's birthday first, on the first.

Izuku, Shota and Hizashi are all invited to Hitoshi's home for cake and presents. Hitoshi had only wanted Izuku to come over, and it was a simple request his parents didn't mind allowing, even though he was still technically grounded.

He'd never been to Hitoshi's house, but it's nice.

Bigger than Shota and Hizashi's apartment but further from the school. It's homey and lived in— there's photos lining the walls. Lots of Shota when he was younger, and those awkward sibling poses with the two Aizawa siblings.

There're tons of pictures of Hitoshi as well, and a whole bunch of people Izuku doesn't know. There's a lot of purple hair in the photos.

Hizashi is in a couple too, and he even spots a photo of Yua with Shota, Hizashi and Oboro. Oboro's doing bunny ears to Hizashi, and Hizashi's arm is slung around Shota's shoulders. Shota himself is holding a small, purple-haired toddler in his arms and they're all smiling— even the toddler reaching for the one behind the camera is grinning toothlessly.

"That was uncle Sho's birthday," Hitoshi offers in explanation when he notices Izuku looking, "I think he'd just turned 16? I obviously don't remember it, but my mom always loved the picture."

It's the two of them in the living room, with the adults all getting the cake ready in the kitchen. He hears faint arguing, but it's playful instead of actual arguing.

"Yeah," Oboro, who's stood at Izuku's side, nods in agreement, "Shota, the boring guy he is, just wanted to go to a cat café that had just opened up. It was really fun actually— he was in his glory surrounded by the cats. Y'know, I think that was the year 'zashi and I got him that cat mug he always uses. I'm honestly surprised he still does use it."

"Looks like it was a lot of fun," Izuku replies to the two of them but not really addressing either of them. "There's a lot of pictures."

"Yeah," Hitoshi huffs, "my mom's sentimental. There're thousands honestly. Dozens of albums—but on the bright side, I have access to most of uncle Sho's childhood pics—I'm talkin' bad haircuts and *everything*."

"And I," Shota calls from the doorway, prompting both Izuku and Hitoshi to startle. He's watching them, mostly Hitoshi, with narrowed eyes, "would like to remind you that I have just as much access to *your* photos. Baby Hitoshi in his birthday suit is far better blackmail material then my stupid haircut in the third grade."

"I hid those," Hitoshi puffs his chest out with a toothy grin.

Shota cocks an eyebrow, turning in the direction of the kitchen, "Yua,

do you still have that picture of Hitoshi parading around on all fours after stripping off *all* his clothes?"

"I do!" comes back from the kitchen, and Hitoshi blanches, "Awh, I just *love* that picture! He had the cutest little bottom— it's in the baby album!"

"Yield!" Hitoshi cries out desperately, arms flailing slightly as a steady blush crawls up his cheeks, "I *yield*, you win! You are not showing him pictures of my ass! Baby or not."

"*Baby or not*?" Shota snorts, straightening up from his lean and stretching his back out, "what, you got pictures of your ass past the baby years?"

"No! Y-you are insufferable," Hitoshi whines. "Remember, it's my birthday; you're not allowed to be mean to me. This feels pretty mean!"

"It's hardly mean," Shota snorts, "baby butts are *nothing*. They're honestly cuter than anything— but I'll tell you what? I don't show him any of yours, and you don't show him any of mine. Deal?"

"God, yes," Hitoshi lurches to shake his uncle's outstretched hand. "Deal."

Izuku's the one who snorts a laugh at that, ducking his attention when both Shota and Hizashi shoot him matching glares.

He lingers as uncle and nephew enter the kitchen, shoving playfully as Yua scolds them for roughhousing and it's just then Izuku notices Hizashi had been watching from the hallway leading to the bathroom.

The blonde steps out only when the other two are out of sight, stepping towards Izuku quickly and throwing an arm over his shoulders as he guides the both of them in the direction of the kitchen slowly. Hizashi's smile widens as he leans closer, "Y'know, Sunshine, *I* have access to *both* of their photos and there's no repercussion for *me* showin' ya. Shota was just the *cutest* lil' guy, and Hitoshi really did have an aversion to *clothes*."

"Man, I love this family," Oboro is cackling as he follows after them.

Hitoshi chooses a strawberry shortcake for his birthday cake, and it's so good. There's not enough room at the table for everyone, so they spread out in the living room to eat the cake. Izuku's immensely glad

he can sit alone (with Oboro) and feed himself. It's nice having both arms back.

It's a bit strange being around all these people who've known each other for so long—Shota and his sister, Hitoshi's father and Hizashi who'd been a part of the dynamic since they were students at Yuuei. It's strange, but he likes it.

This is something he'd never really had growing up. It had always just been him and his mom, and sometimes the Bakugou family.

Still, even if he doesn't quite have a place in the dynamic just yet, no one leaves him out. Hitoshi especially, is the one most in-tune to his presence.

That could definitely be because the other teen has been on grounding isolation, so he's ecstatic for human interaction. Human interaction with someone his own age. Izuku hadn't seen Hitoshi since before the summer camp, and with school being out for the remainder of summer, Izuku doubts he's left the house much after the stunt he'd pulled.

Izuku's sure he probably would've been grounded for a while after Hosu too, if he hadn't of almost died. Seemed a bit like natural punishment for that one.

Izuku thinks Hitoshi is probably the student looking the most forward to moving into the recently announced Yuuei dorms. Can't be grounded when you don't live at home.

Hitoshi opens presents with everyone gathered in the living room. He gets a selection of things—video games, clothes, headphones and some random little trinkets. It's a nice little party.

Izuku feels really bad that he didn't get Hitoshi anything, having only heard it was Hitoshi's birthday when Shota and Hizashi had asked if he was feeling up to attending.

Despite his lack of gift, Hitoshi just scoffs, "honestly, dude, your presence is present enough. Play a couple rounds of that new game with me and we'll consider it a gift."

And by *Izuku* playing the game, Hitoshi means *Oboro* playing the game when they're tucked away hidden in Hitoshi's room while the adults clean up. Izuku plays a bit too, and it's nice to play all three of them together—even though he still sucks at video games.

They move into the dorms right around Hizashi's birthday.

Classes haven't started yet, but the teachers are being given a bit of extra time to settle in before they need to be corralling their students. Izuku still keeps himself busy setting up his dorm room despite the fact that until everyone else moves in, he sleeps upstairs in the apartment too.

It's weird to have *three* bedrooms. Izuku has a room in the apartment above 1-A Height's Alliance, as well as a dorm downstairs like the rest of his class. Plus the *home* apartment where they'll spend holidays and breaks still.

Hizashi's birthday falls on a Thursday, so they can't really do much besides have cake.

Izuku and Shota do bake him the same chocolate cake they'd made for Oboro's birthday while Hizashi is at the radio station preparing for the following evening's Birthday Bash that he does every year for as far back as Izuku remembers, and he almost cries when he walks in the door to a decorated cake and Izuku and Shota both waiting for him wearing party hats (even Shota, and hadn't that taken some pleading on Izuku's end).

It's a quiet evening in—they have Hizashi's favorite curry ordered in because after a long day of preparing for the students to return in the upcoming days, and baking a cake right after, no one's in the mood to cook.

The three of them enjoy each other's company.

Hizashi doesn't get as many presents as Hitoshi, but he doesn't seem to mind. He even scolds Shota for getting him as many gifts as he's gotten, but Shota just shrugs.

Shota and Hizashi both have a glass of sake as Hizashi opens his gifts.

Once again, Izuku hadn't been able to get him a gift. Not with moving into the dorms and suddenly having more stern rules like not leaving campus without being approved for the outing.

He feels awful anyways.

"Nawh! Sunshine," Hizashi coos, wrapping Izuku in a hug, "you didn't need to get me anything! I'm just glad you're okay! That's the best birthday gift you coulda given me, ya'dig?"

“Y’know,” Oboro is grinning that same *Cheshire-cat* grin that he’d worn at the hospital when Izuku had first woken up, clearing his throat and catching half of Izuku’s attention. Izuku’s sitting cross-legged at the coffee table, watching the ghost out of the corner of his eyes as he lifts his glass to take a sip. “If you *really* wanna give ‘im a gift,” the ghost snickers, “you can call him *Pa* again. He’d probably cry.”

Izuku promptly chokes where he’d been taking a sip of water—the water splashing up his own face as he exhales into it. He coughs, pounding at his own chest as he shoots the ghost a betrayed look.

He’d done *what*?

And no one had *told* him?

Oh *God*.

“You okay, Problem Child?” Shota asks as he holds out a napkin.

“F-Fine!” Izuku yelps, taking the napkin and hiding his scarlet cheeks in it. “I’m okay, um, s-sorry, just, I ah... W-wow, I don’t even know *what* happened. Forgot to breathe, or... or breathed into my water or something...”

He’d called them... and they didn’t say anything? They’re acting all *normal*? Did it offend them? Did they... not care? Should he be cautious of what he says? Does? Why didn’t they tell him off for it? Why didn’t they tell him at *all*? He’s so embarrassed.

“And if you really wanna make him bawl, call Shota *dad* again too,” he’s still coughing as Oboro continues, and Izuku just knows the flush is crawling up his ears too. “You’ll get ’em both with that. You should’ve seen their faces when you called them that in the hospital.”

“I-I—” Izuku forces himself to stand, using the table as leverage, “I’m going to the bathroom, um, b-be right back!”

He beelines around the couch, entirely too aware of his guardians watching him as he goes. He gestures at his side for Oboro to follow, and the ghost dutifully trails after him, that obnoxiously smug grin on his face. Asshole.

He locks himself in the bathroom and draws in a breath, “what the hell’re you talking about?”

“You probably don’t remember it,” Oboro sits on the tank of the toilet with his feet on the seat, “but the first time you woke up after being rescued, you called out for Pa and Dad. You were pretty restless until they calmed you down.”

“I... don’t remember... b-but I—” Izuku drags a hand through his hair, “I could’ve been talking about *anyone*—”

Oboro gives him a flat look, “when Shota didn’t respond fast enough, you asked for him again and didn’t relax until he talked to you. It’s nothin’ Izuku, they thought it was cute!”

“It wasn’t cute,” Izuku whines, “it was rude of me! I-I didn’t ask and they’re not... they don’t... I can’t force that on them! And I... I probably didn’t *mean* it. I was um, I was drugged, right? Nothing I said drugged should count for anything!”

“Y’know,” Oboro leans back against the wall, “they say a drunk man’s words, speaks a sober man’s heart.”

“I was drugged, not drunk.”

“An *intoxicated* man’s words, speaks a sober man’s heart.”

Izuku whips around to glare at him, “you’re really not helping my crisis.”

“It’s not a crisis, ‘zuku.” Oboro shakes his head in exasperation. “No one’s mad at you. I told you; they thought it was sweet. What’s the big deal? It was something you said when not completely coherent, they’re not going to hold it against you.”

“The big deal is that they’re *foster* parents. They’re my *teachers*. I... this is *temporary*. They aren’t going to want me, alright? This is for convenience—and I get it. I’m so thankful they helped me but... they *won’t* want to keep me. I shouldn’t have called them that, it was wrong of me. They didn’t consent to that, I f-forced it on them.”

“What are you talking about? Of course they—”

“Look, if my own mother didn’t want to keep me, why would they?” Izuku doesn’t look at the ghost. “I really don’t mind. Like I said, I’m thankful for everything they’re doing, but I won’t blame them when it’s over. I *know* this isn’t permanent. It’s just... it doesn’t matter. Just stop with the comments like that—I have more water in my lungs right now then in my stomach.”

“Izuku,” Oboro softens his expression, leaning forwards, “it won’t—”

“Just leave it, alright?” Izuku sighs, turning on the tap to splash some cold water on his face, “it doesn’t *matter*. They’re just helping me out. Besides, they haven’t brought it up, so maybe they didn’t even notice. I’m not going to force anyone to take care of me— especially not Shota and Hizashi.”

“You really believe this?” Oboro hesitates. “That… you’re just a foster kid to them? That as soon as they’re done with you, they’ll give you up?”

“I’m speaking from experience,” Izuku snorts a laugh—but it’s sad and defeated. “Mom didn’t want me, and dad hardly even got to know me before leaving. And we both know this was one of the only ways I could keep going to Yuuei. They took me in to help me. If things were different—if Shota wasn’t my homeroom teacher; I know for a fact that they wouldn’t have chosen me. Besides, I… I can’t be upset in the end if I don’t expect anything to begin with, right?”

“You’re wrong,” Oboro sighs, “you’re so *smart*, how do you not see this? They want you around, Izuku, you’re their kid now—”

“Leave it,” Izuku forces out, voice coated in defeat and exhaustion. “Even if you *are* right right now, the second they figure me out, I’m doomed. Seeing and speaking to things that aren’t supposed to exist is weird. It’s scary. No one wants a weird kid.”

“’toshi didn’t think it was weird.”

“Hitoshi is a kid too— Sho and ‘zashi are adults. Adults can’t be convinced. My mom didn’t believe me, Auntie Mitsuki and Uncle Masaru didn’t believe, and even Kacchan didn’t believe me until you proved it— I saw so many doctors, Oboro, and you know what they all decided? I was *crazy*. Adults *don’t* believe me.”

Oboro doesn’t have an answer to that.

He can’t defend someone else’s experience even if he believes with his whole heart that Shota and Hizashi will be different. Izuku is adamant, and nothing Oboro says will change the damage that’s been done.

He doesn’t know how to help.

“I’m going back out there,” Izuku offers quietly, drying his face on a

hand towel, “you coming?”

Oboro shakes his head, swallowing hard, “I... I’ve had enough excitement, I think. I’m going to go hang out in your room for a bit. Do you mind?”

“It’s basically *our* room,” Izuku frowns, but he does end up nodding slowly. “I’m just being realistic here. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

And then the teen is turning and leaving the bathroom. He eases the door shut behind him as if Oboro needs *privacy* or something as a ghost. He hears his school friends asking if Izuku’s okay—to which the teen assures brightly that he is.

Oboro hunches forwards, burying his face in his hands.

When did Izuku become such a good *liar*?

The month carries on.

The students return to campus a few days before classes officially start up again so everyone can get set up in their dorms and settle into dorm life.

Izuku is all but bombarded by his classmates—everyone from Iida and Uraraka to Kaminari and Koda, who he admittedly doesn’t talk to a lot checking in and making sure he’s alright. Kacchan doesn’t get the exact same treatment, but he’d probably been able to see most of their classmates either while admitted in the hospital, or after he was discharged.

Things settle out after that though.

It feels like before Izuku even knows it, his birthday has arrived.

It’s not exactly a secret— but it’s also not really *known*. It’s not like he’d announce it, but he wouldn’t hesitate to offer it if someone asked.

He didn’t usually do much celebrating, even before his mother started drifting away from him.

His mother was always busy working to support them, and after he’d stopped being Kacchan’s friend and going to his house, no one really cared or remembered it was his birthday.

Teachers didn’t care if the Quirkless kid survived another year, and it’s

not like he had friends to celebrate with. It was just another day of the week. Even he didn't usually do much in celebration; more often than not he'd just spring for the fancier brand of instant ramen and purchase those prepackaged cupcakes for himself with his allowance.

Birthdays just never really felt much different to any other day. Or, his birthday, at least.

So, when he wakes up on his birthday, a few days after school has started, he hardly even notices it's the fifteenth. He gets dressed, and goes for his morning run around campus, followed by joining his friends for breakfast.

Morning classes are the same as always, everyone still getting back into the swing of being back at school after summer break.

He's having lunch with Todoroki, Hitoshi, Iida and Uraraka (and Oboro) when Kacchan approaches the table. The conversation falls silent as Kacchan settles at the end of the table, shuffling his feet and looking like he wants to be anywhere else except here.

"Uh?" Izuku cocks his head, "something we can do for you, Kacchan?"

The other teen grits his teeth.

"Here," and then a small, colourfully wrapped package is shoved into his hands. Izuku stares down at the item in his hand, gaping in surprise. It's not really heavy, but he has no idea what it is. What is happening?

"Kacchan, what—"

"Happy birthday, Nerd." Kacchan says without looking at him, "the old Hag demanded we get you something because... y'know. Different this year. Open it or don't; I don't give a fuck. Thank my mom anyways, got it, Nerd?"

"O-Oh, um, yes, of course! I will!" Izuku nods hurriedly, "um, thank you, Kacchan!"

"Tch," Kacchan grits his teeth harder, turning away sharply, "whatever."

Izuku stares down at the gift in his hands, a tiny smile lifting to his face. He looks up to see Kacchan's slumped form making his way back to his own lunch table where Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero are

waiting.

He can take a guess at what's changed, but that doesn't change the fact that his childhood friend had just given him a birthday gift. The last time that had happened would've been just before elementary school finished, when Auntie was still unaware of the rift settling seriously between them.

"What the fuck?" Izuku snaps his attention up to where his friends are all staring at him. It's Hitoshi who'd muttered the words. "What the fuck, Izuku?"

"What?" Izuku frowns, setting the gift down on the table so he can pick his chop sticks back up.

"What do you mean, *what*?" Hitoshi hisses, narrowing his eyes. "It's your *birthday*?"

"Um," Izuku rubs at the back of his neck, "yeah?"

"It's your *what*, and you didn't think to tell me?!" Oboro soundlessly slams his hands down on the table, expression twisted between pouting and devastated. "I can't believe you didn't even tell *me*!"

"Why didn't you tell us?" Todoroki frowns, eyebrows creasing together, "happy birthday."

"Oh, um, thank you, Todoroki-kun," Izuku beams, before sobering and giving a nervous laugh, "and uh, I don't know? Didn't seem important? Everyone seemed busy, what with us all moving into the dorms and everything."

"I can't believe you never told us!" Uraraka gasps, "happy birthday, Deku!"

"What a wonderful surprise!" Iida blinks before chopping the air, "I wish you a very happy birthday, Midoriya! I wish I had've known, I could've gotten you a gift as well! You're my very good friend, and I would love to celebrate with you!"

"Same here!" Uraraka pouts, "I feel really bad that I didn't even *know* it was your birthday."

"No, no," Izuku yelps, waving his hands frantically, "don't feel bad! I really don't mind— a-and I didn't tell you, so you couldn't have known! I appreciate the well wishes, so really, don't feel like you need

to do anything else!”

“But it’s your birthday,” Todoroki cocks his head in confusion, “we want to do something nice for you. Birthdays are special. I celebrate mine with Natsuo and Fuyumi ever year.”

“Maybe we can do something to celebrate this weekend!” Uraraka suggests excitedly, “I’m sure Tsu would want to come too—we can all go see a movie or something! Or go for lunch!”

“That’s a good idea,” Iida hums back, “our treat, of course, Midoriya!”

“You don’t have to—”

“We want to,” Todoroki cuts him off before promptly returning to his soba. “All we have to worry about is getting Aizawa-Sensei's permission.”

“That won’t be an issue,” Hitoshi huffs, glaring at Izuku.

“Yes, I doubt it will be,” Iida agrees with a sharp nod, looking between Hitoshi and Izuku, “I don’t think Aizawa-Sensei will have a problem with it, so long as we’re back before curfew! And if there is a problem, we can celebrate in the dorms!”

“So, it’s settled then?” Uraraka grins brightly, “this weekend, we’ll take Deku out for a birthday celebration! What do you think, Midoriya?”

“Um,” Izuku shrugs, tugging anxiously on his own thumb, “a-as long as no one gets me anything else? I think it would be... *nice* to celebrate with you all. Thank you.”

They spend the rest of lunch talking about what they should do that weekend, and Izuku can’t wipe the smile off his face as his listens and glances down at the wrapped gift. He wants to open it now, but also doesn’t know what Kacchan and Auntie would pick for him.

The day continues as usual, thought it seems the information that it was his birthday had spread like wildfire through 1-A— everyone in the class wishes him a happy birthday, and he grins widely as he thanks them.

Nothing else really changes besides the general lightness the comes with there being a birthday in the room. That warm feeling of being the *Birthday Boy*. It’s been a lot of years since he’d felt like this, and

it's so nice to have friends and classmates who make him feel special.

Time flies, and before Izuku knows it, school is finished for the day and his peers are all packing up. He packs up as well, pretending he doesn't feel Shota's gaze on him. He brushes against the still wrapped present in his backpack as he puts his school notebook away.

"Midoriya," the man calls as some of the students file out, "a word before you leave?"

"Y-yes, Sensei!" Izuku squeaks out of habit.

When the students are all cleared out, Shota walks to the door and gestures Izuku to follow him.

"Hizashi and I got a very interesting text from Hitoshi this afternoon," the man says calmly.

"O-oh?" Izuku wrings his fingers. "And you wouldn't... happen to be *upset*, would you?"

"Well," Shota glances sideways at Izuku, "we're a little sad that you didn't tell us it was your birthday yourself. We had no idea, but we would've been more upset if we had of missed your birthday entirely. Hizashi almost bursted my ear drums when he read the text, he's upset we didn't get to plan anything for you. And... I wish I had have looked closer at your files at the start of the year so I would have known, but we're not upset. Don't worry, alright?"

"I didn't mean to not tell you," Izuku hunches his shoulder up.

He feels an arm slip around his shoulders and he automatically lets them slump. Shota's arm tightens just enough to pull Izuku into his side, "I know. Don't worry about it now."

Shota doesn't say much more.

Izuku's grateful for it, he feels like he really let his guardian down. He's led through the school and the guided into Heights Alliance, but they bypass the common area and he's led up the stairs to the apartment.

"Wait here," Shota directs him towards the living room before disappearing down the hallway.

He's not surprised to find Hitoshi flopped on the couch; one foot

kicked up on the coffee table as he scrolls through his phone. The purple-haired teen hardly lifts his gaze as a sarcastic grin curl onto his lips, “the birthday child has arrived.”

“You told them,” Izuku accuses, as he sets his backpack on the floor beside the couch before flopping down beside Hitoshi. He’s well aware of the fact though, and the accusation holds no heat; it’s almost fond.

“It’s your *birthday*,” Hitoshi scoffs, “and they’re your parents. *Of course* I told them. Any idea how shitty they’d feel if your birthday passed and they didn’t even acknowledge it? Didn’t even *know*? Why didn’t you say anything?”

“There didn’t feel like a good time,” Izuku shrugs weakly. He tries not to feel bad as Oboro wilts in the corner. “I didn’t mean to not tell anyone...”

“There were two other birthdays just this month.”

“I didn’t want to take the attention away from you or Hizashi!” Izuku frowns, “that would be rude. You don’t talk about your birthday on someone else’s birthday.”

“You also can’t not talk about it all!” the purple-haired teen fires back, “makes us feel like assholes that we didn’t know— we’re family now, Izuku, that’s something you know about your family. And, to make matters worse, we *wouldn’t* have known if it wasn’t for *Explode-y* in the lunchroom. It’s so not cool, ‘zuku.”

“I know,” Izuku sighs, “I’m sorry.”

“Hey, hey,” Hizashi huffs as he joins them in the room, no longer in his Hero costume. He pauses in front of the couch, “no apologizing on your birthday! It’s a rule!”

“He’s apologizing for not telling us it was his birthday,” Hitoshi crosses his arms over his chest.

“That’s a valid reason to apologize on your birthday,” Shota agrees, trailing in behind Hizashi. “And we will talk about why you didn’t later, but for now, we only have so many hours before curfew for you two, so let’s go.”

“Go?” Izuku cocks his head, “go where?”

“It’s a surprise!” Hizashi cheers. “It’s short notice, but where there’s a

will, there's a way! And there is no way in hell we're not giving our kiddo the absolute *best* last-minute birthday ever, *yeah*!"

The surprise, as it turns out, is the arcade.

He's never been to the arcade.

"You'll love it!" Oboro chirps, "'zashi and I used to come here all the time, and we'd even manage to drag Shota sometimes too! There're claw machines, and arcade games— ticket games and a prize counter!"

"Sooo?" Hizashi throws an arm over both Izuku and Hitoshi's shoulders, "whatcha boys think? This used to be our haunt, ya'dig? Almost every day after school, God, I spent so much money here."

"*Our*?" Shota rolls his eyes, tucking his hands in his pockets. "I didn't come very often."

"Oh no?" Hizashi teases, "tell that to the top score on DDR— I'm sure your record is still unbroken."

"DDR?" Izuku cocks his head to look at Shota, who looks more uncomfortable then when they'd arrived and bought tokens.

"Dance Dance Revolution," Hitoshi tells him, already eyeing a claw machine with Hero plushies inside, "it's a dancing game where you have to step on the arrows. It's pretty hard, I suck at it."

"Shota kicks absolute ass at it," Oboro tells him excitedly, "I had never, in my seventeen years of life, seen anyone get such a good score on the hardest level. There was a literal *crowd* watching him when he took on the single player double mode— that's where you have to go between all eight arrows, it's almost impossible!"

"And it's... a dancing game?"

"Don't look at me like that," Shota huffs, and it's probably the most embarrassed Izuku had ever seen his guardian, "it's more a... rhythm and agility game. Besides, it's not like I really chose to play it. I'm pretty sure the first time I came here with Hizashi and Oboro I was *bribed* into it."

"We did not bribe you," Hizashi laughs thoughtfully before grinning, "I remember Oboro taking your eraser, but he gave it back when you threw him to the ground. You were so harsh!"

“You threw him to the ground?” Izuku squeaks, glancing quickly at a grinning Oboro.

“*No*, I did *not*. I just used my Quirk,” Shota huffs, “the idiot decided to ride one of his clouds up to the ceiling at the exact moment I activated Erasure. He dropped. I apologized.”

“It was an attempt at murder,” Oboro tells Izuku dramatically. “I dropped like two stories and landed on my ass. I almost broke my leg. All for a *cat eraser*. Can you believe that?”

“A cat eraser?” Izuku repeats on autopilot, looking towards his guardians in surprise. What an odd item for this whole story to revolve around. It makes sense though, knowing what he does of Shota.

He’s not ready to find them both staring wide-eyed back.

“How did—”

“Bingo!” Hizashi laughs good-naturedly, “man, Sho, the kid knows you so well. It *was* a cat eraser. Good guess, Sunshine! Anyways, Shota only ended up coming with us that day because he felt bad that he almost killed Oboro. He even bought Oboro some tokens to make up for it, which he spent on DDR. He was never any good—it's like he had two left feet, ya’dig?”

“Aye!” Oboro scoffs, arms crossing over his chest as he pouts, “not so much a twinkle-toes yourself, man. You don’t do close combat for a reason! He’s a liar, ‘zuku, I was so good at that game.”

“Like you have any room to talk,” Shota lulls his head in Hizashi’s direction, looking unimpressed, “for a man who loves music, you have no *rhythm* whatsoever.”

“*Thank you*,” Oboro huffs as Hizashi gapes in offense like a fish out of water. “I can’t believe he’s throwing the dead friend under the bus—that asshole. Good thing Shota’s got my back—”

Shota drags a hand up through his hair, “you both were awful. Neither of you could pass anything past the ‘basic’ difficulty. I only tried the stupid game so I wouldn’t have to be witness to you two dancing like chickens any longer.”

Izuku does laugh when Oboro and Hizashi squawk out synchronized ‘*hey!*’s. There’s something about being witness to the three friends

bantering, even if not everyone is heard, that's nice. His guardians aren't stressed, and they're in a casual setting, and Oboro is making comments and being *heard*. Adding to the conversation in a way only Izuku gets to know.

"Will you play today?" Izuku asks quietly, looking between his guardians. "It sounds like fun."

Hitoshi at Izuku's side has brightened considerable, a smirk on his face. "Yeah, uncle Sho, *will you play today?* 'zashi says you've got game, but I've never seen it."

Oboro is grinning widely, almost bouncing on his feet as he looks between Shota and Hizashi before focusing solely on Shota who's watching Izuku with suspicion narrowed eyes. Hizashi has perked up, already scanning the arcade for the DDR machine, hand clamping in Shota's long sleeve shirt sleeve.

Shota hesitates before slumping his shoulders and letting Hizashi tug him towards the now located DDR game by a grip on his sleeve.

"Oh my God!" Oboro wheezes through a laugh as he follows the two adults, "he's actually gonna do it! You, Izuku, have that man *wrapped* around your little finger. He hasn't even come here in years, let alone hopped on the DDR game. This is perfect."

"I've been trying for years to get him to play this," Hitoshi tells Izuku under his breath as the two of them follow the two men. "You work *miracles*. I will forever be in your debt— now, help me figure out how to record this without getting caught. My mom would *love* to see it."

"I will confiscate your phone," Shota throws a look over his shoulder at Hitoshi.

"You're not my teacher," Hitoshi cocks an eyebrow. "We're not even on campus."

Shota offers that scary grin, "yeah," he agrees, "which means I don't have to follow the school rules. You're not my *student* right now, you're my *nephew*. All bets are off."

"Did that sound like a threat to you?" Hitoshi wrinkles his nose, turning to Izuku, "that feels a lot like a threat."

"Record me and *die*, you brat."

Izuku snickers “I’m pretty sure *that* was a threat.”

Hitoshi snickers back, glancing at where Shota is looking back at them in exasperation as Hizashi drags him along, completely ignoring the conversation in what could only be a learned sort of way. Izuku wonders how many times he’d just completely ignored Hitoshi and Shota bickering over the years.

The game they arrive at is big. There’s a huge screen and eight coloured arrows on a platform of sorts.

Oboro is the first to bounce onto the small stage, grinning widely, “man, this thing brings back so many memories!”

“’zuku should play first since he’s never played,” Hitoshi tells the group, “and I’ll play with him since you two have that *weird* rivalry thing going on. We can do Easy mode versus— it'll be fun.”

“That’s a good idea!” Hizashi nods, already moving to insert some token, “step on up, Listeners, let’s see what you got before Sho and I smoke the two of you with amazing scores!”

They play the game, and somehow manage to make it to the end. It’s fun, but Izuku knows there’s no way he’d be any good at any other level.

Hitoshi doesn’t look too entertained by another round either, purple eyes flicking towards where Shota is watching them from just behind the balance bar, “so, uncle Sho, you playin’ or not?”

“Alright, alright,” Shota sighs grabbing Hizashi arm and pushing his sleeve up enough to access his wrist. The dark-haired man steals on of the hair ties off of Hizashi’s wrist and makes quick work of tying his hair up. “Let’s do this. And, just so we’re clear, I’m only entertaining this because it’s your birthday, Problem Child.”

Izuku watches with a smile as his two guardians step up on the platform, easily maneuvering through the menu like it’s second nature. They select the second to last hardest level— for Hizashi’s sake, Shota tells them without looking back. The blonde shoots his husband an offended glare.

The music is really upbeat, and the beat itself is almost hard to follow, but Shota and Hizashi are managing it. It’s amazing, really, how fast they’re moving their feet. Izuku stares in surprise, as Oboro lets out a low whistle beside him, “cool, eh?”

The arrows get faster as the song progresses, and Shota moves without hardly breaking a sweat. He's quick on his feet, and fluid when it comes to the placement of his feet.

"How are they doing that?" Izuku asks Hitoshi, who looks just as impressed. "I've never seen Shota move like that in class ever—do you think it's from all the practice as a Hero? I bet he's learned a lot from his Hero work!"

"His Hero work?" Hitoshi snorts, "oh no, no, no. Nope that's not it, but I can see where you're coming from. He's agile and swift, sure. And fast, but... but that's not why he's so good at this. Well, not entirely, at least."

"How is he so good then?" Izuku lets confused eyes trail to where Oboro is snickering behind his hands as he listens in on the conversation without taking his eyes off the two DDR screens.

"You see," Hitoshi throws an arm over Izuku's shoulders, "uncle Sho took some *dance* classes as a kid. Tap, mostly."

"No way," Izuku yelps, gaze shooting to where Shota still has a line of 'Marvelous' on his side of the screen. Hizashi is struggling to keep up. "I don't— that can't— r-really? Tap dancing? Shota? A-are you sure?"

"There's pictures," Hitoshi offers, before his grin sharpens, "and a couple videos that I'll be more than happy to show you. I didn't believe it either, until I saw the *proof*. My mom says he could've been a professional tap dancer if he hadn't gone into Heroics."

Watching Shota's quick foot work, he really can see the basis of tap dancing in how he steps with either his toes, or his heels depending on the position of the arrow beneath him— unlike Hizashi who's throwing his entire foot down on each arrow clumsily. It really does make a difference.

"We didn't know Shota when he took tap lessons," Oboro tells Izuku, leaning on the balance pole behind the game. "Honestly, we were thrown completely when he hopped up on that platform beside Hizashi for the first time and pulled this act out— we *begged* to know his secret as to how he was so good. And he didn't tell us for *weeks*. It took a lot of insistence on Hizashi's part to break him. Still never seen him actually tap dance though. Not in person."

"That's so cool!" Izuku grins. "He's so good at it!"

“Well, he puts everyone else to shame,” Hizashi wheezes, “jeez, Sho, how’re you not rusty at all? You haven’t touched this game in like ten years!”

“Natural talent,” the dark-haired man offers drily. “It’s literally just rhythm, foot placement and speed.”

“Says the tap dancer,” Hizashi whines as the song cuts out on his screen after to many missed arrows. “I like to *listen* to music, not *dance* to it. This game is so hard!”

Hizashi steps off the platform with a pout as Shota finishes up his game.

“Now I’m sad,” Hizashi pouts.

“Why?” Shota snorts as he watches his rating come up on the screen. “You already knew you sucked at it. You were walking into failure before we even started.”

“You’re so *mean*!” Hizashi cries, stepping back up onto the platform to playfully shove his husband, “and in front of the babies too! I’m pretty sure this is spousal abuse!”

“Please,” Shota huffs, flapping a dismissive hand, “if anything, it’s *emotional* abuse. Besides, I’m just stating the obvious. Your first wrong move was thinking you could beat the hard mode after not playing for years. If you couldn’t when we were kids, you probably can’t now after all this time.”

“That’s Hizashi’s *toxic trait*,” Hitoshi whispers to Izuku with a solemn nod. Izuku can’t help but giggle.

“You both are awful human beings, you know that? Uncle and nephew alike,” Hizashi heaves dramatically, “so, so cruel. This is a toxic environment.”

“This is an arcade, of course it’s toxic.” Shota blinks. “Just be glad all the heckler teenagers aren't here this afternoon—if you thought they were mean when we were teenagers too, imagine any pre-teens seeing you losing the game *now*.”

“Yeesh, you’re right!” Hizashi shakes his head, “pre-teens are mean. They will always make *your* abuse look like child’s play. I never knew a random child’s words could *hurt* so much.”

“There was a group of kids who were really mean,” Oboro tells him, he’s up on the abandoned platform now, tapping the arrows with the toes of his shoes like he’s getting a feel of the game. He has no weight to him, so it doesn’t do anything more then glitch the screens faintly. “They thought Shota was cool after seeing him play— not that he cared— but Hizashi and I were bullied by those children whenever we touched it. Now that I think about it, maybe we *did* suck?”

Izuku tries not to smile when he thinks of children heckling Oboro and Hizashi. It’s an entertaining thought because kids can be *mean*. Kota had been a spitfire and a tough nut to crack too. You just can’t take the things kids say to heart because they *will* hurt your feelings.

“Can we go play the claw machines?” Hitoshi cocks an eyebrow, “as much as I love you two sharing your childhood trauma of being bullied by *kids* in your teen years, of course. But it’s, y’know, a birthday, remember?”

“Right!” Hizashi jolts, “sorry, kiddos! We’re getting all reminiscent over here—”

“*You’re* getting reminiscent; those kids liked me for whatever reason. Flocked around me like ducklings whenever you two dragged me here.”

“They probably thought you were cool,” Izuku offers, “*I* thought that was cool. I’ve always thought your Hero work was good, but that was amazing! Do you think your dance classes helped with your agility? Should *I* take a dance class?”

“This is why he’s my favorite,” Shota tells Hitoshi and Hizashi as he hooks an arm over Izuku’s shoulders, “now ‘toshi’s right, let's go do something else. We’ve got a reservation we can’t miss in a little while.”

“Oh, right,” Hizashi nods seriously, “can’t miss that!”

They play the claw machines for a while—Hizashi wins both a purple and a green cat plushie from one of the machines, and laughs when he hands Hitoshi and Izuku the cat the matches their hair colour. Izuku bows his in thanks, while Hitoshi narrows his eyes at the cat, expression drawn between adoration and offense.

Both of his guardians turn out to be amazing at ticket machines. There’s a rivalry there that spurs them on, so by the time they’re ready to leave, there’s a hefty amount to be exchanged for prizes between

the four of them.

“We don’t need any of this stuff,” Shota shrugs, burying his hands deeper in his pockets, “and it’s your birthday. Pick something you like, Problem Child.”

“W-what about ‘toshi?”

“Nothing else I want,” the purple-haired teen shrugs. He’s already holding the cat sticker book he’d selected with his own tickets, with the little head of the purple cat peeking out from his sweater pocket. “All yours, Birthday Boy.”

He feels childish zeroing in on the All Might figurine on one of the higher selves— it’s his Silver-Age costume and it’s so cool; very detailed for what it’s priced as. He can imagine that very figure being quite expensive in any merch store.

Shota seems to know Izuku better then he thinks, because when Izuku shrugs awkwardly, the man asks for that very figure. The worker behind the counter barely even blinks as he turns to grab a boxed figure from the back room.

It’s Hitoshi who suggests the small paw-print shaped pillow, telling Izuku it’ll fit in with his bed theme of the now two stuffed cats he owns. Oboro loudly exclaims it’s a *good idea*, from where he’s up-close inspecting all the little trinkets behind the prize counter, but Izuku is just mortified his friend knows about the cat plush he already has, but then again, Hitoshi had been in his room before.

The remainder of the tickets are spent on small items—mostly sweets that Izuku shares with everyone as they’re all heading towards the door, Shota ushering them along.

They end the evening in a cat café with an hour reservation.

The four of them order a warm drink and a slice of cake.

They’re cuddled by cats and his guardians even purchase some cat treats that have all the cats in the room flocking to their table. Izuku has a lap full of orange tabby cat, and Hitoshi is trying to lure over a solid black cat. Shota is petting the cat in Izuku’s lap while Hizashi waves around a feather toy that three different cats are all stalking.

Izuku can’t help but grin as the slices of cake and hot chocolates (coffee for only Shota because he’d forbade Hitoshi from ordering one

as well) arrive. Everything looks so good— but before he can dig in, Hitoshi steals his fork.

It's Hizashi who produces a small package of candles from his pocket, and Shota lights the wick with a lighter he grabs from his own pocket. Izuku watches the light flicker, feeling the chilling presence of Oboro over his shoulder, who's leaning on the back of his chair.

"You gonna make a wish?" Oboro asks softly, face right by Izuku's head.

He gives a hardly there shake of his head as he leans forwards and blows out the single candle on his slice of cake. He glances around— Hizashi is grinning widely, and Hitoshi is asking what he wished for. Shota is leaning on his fist, watching Izuku with a soft expression.

What more is there for him to wish for?

Later that night, Izuku will open the present from Kacchan, hidden away in his dorm room after returning from his birthday outing with his family, or... uh, his *guardians and friend*.

Inside is a single notebook, the front cover of those book is one of those photos that move and change the image depending on the angle you're looking at it. The image it swaps between are two photos of All Might in two of his coolest costumes. Izuku takes a second to look back and forth between the two images, tilting the book in his hands.

It's obviously one of those books that's marketed towards children— the moving image of *All Might* is proof of that, but Izuku stares down at the book and smiles.

It's perfect.

Chapter End Notes

> Izuku has poor self-esteem and he's emotionally traumatized— I am so sorry little green-bean. But he got a birthday! Happy (very, very late) birthday to Hitoshi, Hizashi and Izuku! I had planned to do a birthday chapter after like the first kidnapping arc chapter, it just took a bit longer to actually finish the arc then I thought it would! It was a lot of fun writing all three birthdays (sort of) and I hope you guys liked it!
>
> Vigilantes canon tap dancer Shota! Vigilantes canon tap dancer

Shota! I promised fluff, and I hope I delivered! Also, apologies for the emotional distress, I feel like it can't be Izuku-centric fic without some emotional distress. The poor kiddo just needs to be hugged, wrapped in a blanket and given a hot chocolate and get adopted by erasermic :D

Anywho! As always, lemme know what you thought of the chapter! I adore reading all of your comments! Knowing you guys are enjoying this as much as I am is my motivation to keep this running! I appreciate you all, so thank you for taking the time to read, leave a kudos and comment! <3

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Back again with another chapter! I liked this one too :)

Also! As a side note, I've seen a lot of people asking about an update schedule for this fic, and I'm so sorry for not responding to everyone asking! The answer is, that I try to have a new chapter done every 7-10 days, but that depends on how busy I am IRL with work and life and all that fun stuff. Hope that helps for everyone curious!

That's all I think I needed to mention? So, as always, enjoy the update~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Returning home from Izuku's birthday evening out is busy, for lack of better words.

They narrowly miss curfew, arriving exactly three minutes before the boys are supposed to be tucked away safe and sound in their dorms. It doesn't really matter much—Shota could, technically, wave off Izuku being late, and he's sure they could've done some sweet talking to Nemuri, who is the 1-C teacher living above the dorms, and bargained Hitoshi's punishment away.

Not that Nemuri doesn't already *owe* Shota a handful of favors for all the times he'd been roped into something stupid at her insistence and its always promise that *'I'll owe you one, Shota! C'mon!'*. He doesn't cash in very often.

And it really doesn't matter in the end anyways, considering they were both being escorted by teachers. They'd walked Hitoshi to his dorm room and bid him a good night, and then the three of them had returned to the 1-A dorms.

Most of 1-A was in the kitchen, and Shota could smell cupcakes baking—no doubt for Izuku, who seems to have come to the same realization, head ducking as he scuffs his foot in embarrassment. The teen shakes his head before kneeling down to untie and take off his shoes.

When the teen stands back to his full height, he hesitates for a second,

glancing around before launching at where Shota and Hizashi are toeing off their own shoes, catching them both in a half-hug.

“Thank you,” the boy had whispered, lingering just long enough for Shota to ruffle his finger through the kid’s hair, as Hizashi’s hand lifts to rub at his back and return the hug. Izuku presses into the embrace before tearing himself back and taking a couple little steps backwards until he’s almost in the threshold of the common area.

He hesitates a second time, managing a little wave in their direction before he’s turning on his heels and moves towards the kitchen where Shota hears his class greeting Izuku happily— some asking about where he’d been (Izuku stutters out an excuse of an extra Quirk training session), while others confess to the birthday cupcakes with enthusiasm.

He listens to the conversations for just a second, the cheerful invitations for Izuku to help decorate the cupcakes so they can all have one or two before bed, and their foster child readily agrees, a warmth in his voice that has brightness settling in Shota’s chest.

Shota shakes his head as he follows Hizashi over to the elevator.

When they finally get upstairs to the apartment, the cats are weaving underfoot.

Fish lets out a high-pitched meow as Blanket rushes to the door in an attempt to escape. Hizashi shuts it just in time, and receives an annoyed flick of the cat’s tail for his troubles. Nemo circles around Shota’s legs before she stands on her hind legs and stretches up Shota’s leg, small little paws batting at his knee.

He caves and picks her up.

“Naughty cat,” Hizashi scolds Blanket, waggling a finger that that cat just ducks down into a stalking position and chirps at. “Last thing we need is you terrorizing the entire building. The door doesn’t lead to outside anymore, Blanket. It’s just more building.”

Shota snorts a laugh into Nemo’s fur, ignoring the swish of her tail as he does so. “He's a cat, Hizashi, he doesn’t understand you.”

“Well,” Hizashi clicks his tongue, bending down to scoop the cat up, booping him on the nose, “he *should* understand he’s an indoor cat. He’s been told enough times. It’s very dangerous out there, Blanket. You’re an indoor cat for a reason, you little trouble maker.”

“Scolding him will not make him understand human language any more than he is capable of,” Shota huffs. “Leave him be, he’s just adventurous.”

“As *Satan* should be,” Hizashi teases drily, ruffling the cat’s ears and the fur on the top of his head before letting the cat slink out of his arms, “we should’ve known he’d be trouble from the start— no cat sweet enough to get a cutesy name like *Blanket* when they’re a kitten will ever turn into anything besides a menace to society.”

Shota snorts out another laugh as he pets Nemo’s head. Fish doesn’t tend to like being picked up anymore, it’s hard on his body; still, the aged cat sits in the doorway watching, meowing whenever he sees fit to remind everyone of his presence. “He’s still cute.”

“Sure,” Hizashi scoffs, “but he’s the devil behind that cute little face. Never trust the cute ones, Sho, they’re always trouble. All three of these cuties are little demons. The devil in cat form, our precious spoiled-brat and the nipping cheese-monster.”

Nemo squirms in his arms, so Shota sets her on the floor, stroking her head once before she saunters away from all of them. He watches her turn the corner before glancing back at Hizashi. “I’m going to go make a coffee and get some marking done before my curfew patrol. Did you want a tea?”

Hizashi groans, lifting a hand to card through his hair, “yeah,” he pouts, “I guess I should get started on marking those essays. ‘toshi’s class is getting antsy to get them back. Look at you being the good influence for once!”

“For once?” Shota wrinkles his nose, “I seem to recall one of us keeping the group out of trouble, and it certainly wasn’t you or Oboro. And we all ended up in detention whenever Nemuri was involved.”

“Hey! Tensei was usually a good boy, but fine,” Hizashi relents with a teasing smile, “the good *teacher* influence, then. We both know you hate marking with your entire existence. I still think the only reason you were talked into getting your teaching license was because you knew I’d help you mark.”

“Guilty,” Shota snorts. It’s no secret. “Who in their right mind would *want* to mark twenty-plus essays. Twenty-plus, and not to mention upwards of three classes. That’s at least sixty essays, Hizashi. Have you seen some of their handwriting? The lack of grammar? It’s a step up from torture.”

“Don’t be dramatic,” Hizashi laughs, “at least you only really have the Heroics students to worry about, I have Business, Gen Ed, Support *and* Heroics to worry about. A core subject teacher never rests! I have no sympathy for you *Mr Only-Teaches-Heroics*.”

“Now who’s dramatic,” Shota snaps, but his tone holds no heat. “Will grab the assignments on the dresser when you go into the bedroom for your bag?”

“Only since you asked so nicely!” Hizashi flashes a grin as he turns towards their bedroom, “and because you’re making me tea. Matcha, please! You always make it better than I do!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Shota rolls his eyes, but does head into the kitchen— Fish and Blanket trailing after him. He has no idea where Nemo disappeared to, she’s still settling with the move and the new furniture.

Before long the two of them are settled at the table with piles of assignments spread between them. Shota’s marking a modern-day discrimination essay that 1-A had to research for. All they really had to do was read the textbook of Pre-Quirk era and compare it to current discrimination article he’d linked them to.

Discrimination isn’t new— it's an age-old problem, but it has altered along with the Quirks shaping the world as they know it. Quirks and usefulness in a world of Heroes and Villains was where the line tended to be drawn now. It was a disgusting sentiment, honestly, hence why Shota was teaching his kids about discrimination; attempting to teach what he knows has been instilled— by parents, guardians, school, the news and society itself— out of the next generation of Heroes.

It’s a headache already, and he’s only three essays in.

Clearly, they need to spend some more time looking at discrimination —Quirkless and Quirked.

Not a single student thus far had thought to delve into Quirkless discrimination, which is quite possibly the more pressing discrimination of the two. A Quirk deemed bad is terrible, but not having something that the entire world is built upon, *relies on*, is damn near *dangerous*.

He’ll be taking marks off for missing points though, since the article had a good couple paragraphs on Quirkless discrimination that they’d disregarded entirely.

He wonders what Izuku will have to say. He's always handed in quality essays when he actually put in the time and effort—and there was definitely some experience with discrimination considering he'd gotten his Quirk so late.

Shota hopes the kid's essay doesn't make him want to murder people, but he's sure it will.

That seems to be a theme when it comes to whenever Izuku reveals *any* of his trauma, in as small of snippets he has been. Little mentions that settle acidic-like in Shota's stomach.

Society has well and truly fucked up when it comes to that kid. He knows the kid's been wronged, and the heartbreaking part of that is Shota doesn't even know the half of it. He's yet to even see the entire tip of the iceberg, let alone what lays below sight.

Shota loathes to think about what school would've been like for Izuku before manifesting his Quirk. Children are cruel—preteens and teenagers by far the worst, though kids themselves are brutally honest and hurtful. Middle school would've been absolute hell for someone without a Quirk in a society that runs on Quirk usefulness.

Not only that, but Shota doubts the kid had many positive adult figures in his life.

Skittishness of teachers and adults in general was always a red flag.

He'd noticed how the kid would tuck into himself and look at Shota like he'd laugh or ridicule him at any given moment. Whenever the raven glanced over, or they happened to share a half-second of eye contact. Any sort of kindness (or even just not straight malice, perhaps?) from him was rewarded with caution and suspicion until he'd managed to gain Izuku's trust.

Back when the boy had come to him, asking for help. When he'd been deemed safe and the child had finally informed him after he'd sent the first few days of classes watching and waiting. Studying and trying to figure out how a student like Midoriya could have a Quirk like that, an attitude like he did, and *still* not have an ounce of control.

What had he said back then? A *friend* had insisted Shota would help?

Shota bites his bottom lip, shaking his head.

Honestly, Shota's lucky that the Hero worship Izuku had had

outshined his hesitance and cautiousness. He's not sure where they'd be now if Izuku had never sought him out and asked for help.

Shota can only imagine at some point, uninformed of the situation, he would've canned Izuku for his lack of control. Under the suspicion he was a stuck-up powerful-Quirked brat who didn't care to learn control, expecting to float through class on sheer strength alone.

It's not the first time Shota's expelled a kid like that, and he knows it won't be the last.

Plus, a Quirk coming in that late? Fifteen is insanely late, even for *late bloomers* considering the umbrella term generally covers Quirks manifesting before the age of ten. Shota's not sure he's ever heard of a Quirk coming in past twelve, and even those are one in every million *at least*.

Maybe they should get the kid in for some testing. He honestly doubts Midoriya Inko had looked into anything, especially if Aldera didn't mention anything, and Recovery Girl, as good as she is, isn't specialized in Quirk development.

Still, he knows what most teachers do—how powerful Quirks are prioritized and the holder just as much so. A prime example had been Bakugou. A poor attitude, but a Quirk that was *suited* for Heroics. Shota honestly doesn't doubt the kid had ever been reprimanded by a teacher a day in his life, from the way he'd sneered in Shota's direction that first day.

He knows enough to know that Izuku and Bakugou's rocky relationship shaped through school, and he'd seen Bakugou think with his anger instead of his head on several occasions, and he'd so easily used his Quirk on Izuku in those first few days of school, so he's doubtful it hadn't been a *new* development for the new school year.

It was *learned*. Something he'd been doing for who knows how long, and it was obvious he was used to getting away with it. The surprise in Bakugou's gaze had been almost as glaring as the *actual* glare.

Shota has a sick feeling that Aldera Junior High teachers didn't care about the Quirkless child being used as a punching bag because he lacked a Quirk.

Shota doubts it's just the lack of Quirk too.

Shota would bet that Izuku's mumbling and lack of attention isn't new

either, but there's no record anywhere of testing being done, or it even being brought up in any of his records. There were reprimands though, comments of him distracting his peers, not listening, talking through class. Unfocused. Distracted. All those comments and yet his grades were high.

He'll admit Izuku's habits are a bit odd—he'd thought as much the first time the kid's eyes had tracked something that wasn't there, or when he'd seemingly be having one-sided conversations. Izuku was always looking somewhere else, eyes drifting subconsciously before whipping back to their target. He'd lose focus but force himself back.

It was odd, sure, but it wasn't really *that* weird— at least not to Shota.

The thing was, teenagers (and kids in general, really), he'd come to realize, were *quirky*. They were strange, and weird and if he didn't see it as harmful, he tended to let it be. You can't punish a kid for being who they are, which Shota has a sneaking suspicion is exactly what happened at Aldera, according to his records.

It was never enough to be cause for concern though, not in his class, and not like how the middle school teachers had reported. Shota didn't care what Izuku did, so long as his grades didn't suffer, and that he wasn't distracting his classmates.

And he *didn't*.

More often than not, the boy was whispering under his breath. He'd look around, and focus on other things that Shota was never able to spot, but he got his work done, and the only one who ever really complained about the mumbling was Bakugou, but since they'd rekindled whatever concerning friendship they share, even that hasn't been happening.

There's really nothing to be concerned about—people talk to themselves all the time, right? Izuku's probably been doing it since he was little, as far as Shota can see. It's normal.

But it's also not.

There's something off about it. Something weird. Something he just can't place his finger on. There's definitely an unknown to this equation and Shota hasn't got the faintest idea what it could be.

Shota's thoughts loop back around to the cat eraser from that evening.

Had either of them mentioned it was a cat one? Shota doesn't think he had, and he doesn't remember Hizashi saying anything either. It was a vague detail that didn't really matter. It didn't add anything to the story.

So... how?

How had the Problem Child known?

That was such a specific little detail— who would just randomly know something like that? There had only been three of them in the classroom that day. Oboro, Hizashi and himself. There were only three people who knew just what started the whole thing.

It didn't make *sense*.

"What's got you all pouty?" Hizashi asks. Shota lifts his attention, eyebrows creasing. He hadn't known his expression had shifted. Hizashi isn't looking at him, eyes reading over the assignment on the table in front of him. Shota has half a mind to believe he imagined his husband's words, until Hizashi is looking up with a cocked eyebrow, "what's up?"

"I was just thinking," Shota reveals easily, setting his pen down and carding his fingers through his own hair. He gives a sigh, "did you think Izuku was... I don't know, acting a little off today?"

"Off?" Hizashi hums, setting his own pen down and arching his back in a stretch before slumping back against the backrest, "off how? I don't know if Izuku has a *normal* here, Shota. You'll need to be a bit more specific."

"I was thinking about what he said—about the eraser. At the arcade."

"The eraser?" Hizashi blinks before understanding lights up in his features, "oh, the cat eraser?"

"Yeah," Shota drags a hand down his face. "How'd he know? That's not something you just *know*, y'know? I mean, sure, he could've guessed—it isn't that much of a leap that I like cats. And anyone who knows me, knows I wouldn't give two shits about any old eraser, but still... I don't know, it just... it was odd."

"Yeah," Hizashi nods, thumbing at his top lip thoughtfully, "I was thinking about that too. He definitely could've *guessed*; the Listener's pretty smart but... he just *knew*. He knew, but in a way that he didn't

know, ya'dig? It was a question still."

Shota gives an agreeing hum. "I've noticed it before, but not like today. He's never done anything like that—he shouldn't have known such a small detail, but he *did*. I'm just... confused."

"Hn," Hizashi hums out, head lulling back so he's staring up at the ceiling, "it could be a Quirk— his mother has a sort of telekinesis Quirk, doesn't she? We don't know his father's Quirk, but maybe there's some sort of... underlay. A mental based ability that's been passed down or something."

"Izuku already has a Quirk," Shota reminds, "y'know, *Superpower*? The Quirk that's broken over eighty-percent of his body since he manifested it?"

"Uh huh," Hizashi's lip twitches into a smile, "says the man whose Quirk is a scarily powerful Erasure but who also has that *hint* of your mother's own secondary telekinesis Quirk that was passed down by your grandmother that's combined into that Erasure Quirk. Y'know, the one that makes your hair stand on end when you activate your Quirk? You know better than anyone that Quirks aren't linear, they can combine and get stronger."

"I know," Shota narrows his eyes, "I just think it's weird. It's was just the three of us who were there that day—I didn't tell him; I assume *you* didn't tell him and Oboro... *couldn't* have. It's illogical. I don't understand."

"I didn't tell him," Hizashi confirms, "honestly, I barely remember that day. I wasn't even the one who fell from the ceiling and my life still flashed before my eyes. I couldn't think of *anything*, least of all your kitty eraser, as I watched him plummet."

"He was fine," Shota huffs softly, that distant feeling of fond guilt tugging at his chest. "He got up just fine, and he played that stupid arcade game just fine too."

"Yeah, but he still had a gnarly bruise though! I mean yeesh, his ass was like *completely* black. I don't know how he didn't break something! I mean— his tailbone, at least, ya'dig?"

"What," Shota drawls with an upward tick of his lips, "you spend a lot of time looking at our friends' asses in school, or just Oboro in particular?"

“Nawh, are ya *jealous* I was lookin’ at other men, Sweetheart? It’s not like we were a thing back then,” Hizashi snorts, his socked foot hooking around Shota’s ankle under the table. “I thought you still sorta hated me around then anyways. And we both know Oboro wasn’t *shy* in the least— how a teenaged boy could drop his pants so easily I’ll never understand. Hey though, don't you worry, Darlin’, I spent *way more* time checkin’ *you* out.”

“I’m honored,” Shota teases drily.

The Underground Hero sobers, glancing down at his papers, “I still just don’t feel great about it, ‘zashi, I mean how did he know? Even if it *was* a residual Quirk affect—what sort was it? Should we be worried about it? About *him*? Does it have anything to do with the mumbling; the staring off into space? Should we be helping him train it? Does he even know it’s there?”

“Hey, hey,” Hizashi frowns, “calm down a little.”

Hizashi hand snakes across the table and settles lightly over where Shota’s own is pressed flat over the essays. He appreciates how Hizashi’s fingers curl into the gap between his fingers and thumb, letting the fingers wedge under his hand and grip in a grounding squeeze.

“He’s okay, Shota.” Hizashi voice takes a calming tone, “this isn’t a new problem— even if it’s just now really being drawn to our attention. He’s been dealing with the mumbling habit and attention difficulties just fine for *years* before we met him. I don’t know how he knew about the eraser, Sho, I really don’t. But I also don’t think asking and cornering him is the way to go.

“He’s warming up to us— he's settling in. He’s a teenager who’s been dealing with this for longer than we’ve even known him. We can’t press, and I know you know that. Prying will make it worse. Prying will make him feel cornered. We’ll have to let him come to us, or discuss it as a family if it becomes a *problem* and we see a legitimate *need* for it to be brought up. I think it’ll embarrass him, Sho. He’s just not *there* yet.”

Hizashi pauses, thumb dragging over Shota’s knuckles lightly, “if we don’t have to pry, I don’t think we should just yet. We’re in a sensitive position, Shota, I don’t want to break the trust we’re building. I agree it should be addressed, but... maybe not just yet.”

“I suppose it doesn’t affect his school,” Shota slumps in his chair, “and

none of the other teachers have really said anything— Hound Dog hasn't even mentioned anything. He's even gotten a little better keeping focus during class, and I don't catch him mumbling quite as much. I... I just don't like leaving something like this to fester."

"I know," Hizashi lets out a quiet laugh, "but it doesn't seem to bother him— and you remember how skittish he was when you asked Recovery Girl about it. He could hardly look us in the eyes. If it becomes a problem, we'll talk to him about seeing someone and getting a possible diagnosis, but if he doesn't see it as a problem, we should respect it."

"Until it affects him," Shota presses his lips into a straight line.

"*Bingo*, Babe," Hizashi shoots halfhearted finger-guns, "he's a mature lil' kiddo. We have to give him some benefit of the doubt."

"Yeah," Shota rubs as his eyes, "okay."

"Besides, we don't even know for certain it is a residual Quirk," Hizashi continues with a soft smile, "he really could just have some sort of ADHD or something. There's no definitive answer here, and there *are* logical explanations to what he does. I know how you and *logic* go hand in hand. And we aren't even certain one of us didn't accidentally give the detail away during the story. We both know he's scarily perceptive."

"Maybe we should set him up to see a Quirk specialist? A professional." Shota relents, "or at least talk to Recovery Girl about those additional tests she mentioned. After we run it by him, at least. I just think it would be helpful."

"If he agrees," Hizashi shrugs, "it doesn't directly affect his health, so we can't really force him, ya'dig?"

"*I dig*," Shota sighs, and ignores the way his husband visibly brightens. That's always his favorite response. Shota very rarely humors him.

They settle back into their marking, letting silence fall over them. Shota just can't seem to focus on the papers though. It feels like they should be doing more for Izuku. Hizashi's right—it hasn't technically affected his life, but at the same time, if they can help it, why aren't they?

Shota likes to think he knows his kids better, his 1-A brats, but he also knows Hizashi knows teenagers in general better. Outside of school,

he's the one who does more socializing—whenever *Put Your Hands Up* radio hosts anything, the teens are always the ones who flock, if only just to chat with and meet Present Mic.

He relents, and tries to force the thoughts down. He'll just keep a closer eye on his kids, and he'll do some research so he's ready for if he does need to take things into his own hands. As is, he's already certain some of his other kids might have some developmental issues —Kaminari who Shota is near *certain* has dyslexia.

Shota waves away the train of thought.

He glances down at the papers, and picks up his pen, just, he still distracted.

"Hey," Shota breaks the silence.

Hizashi glances up, one eyebrow arching in silent question.

"Why did you stop me?" Hizashi cocks his head in confusion, so Shota elaborates softly, "at the arcade, when I was going to ask him about the eraser."

"Oh," Hizashi breathes out before shrugging sheepishly, "I didn't want him to freeze up, y'know? He was already a bit on edge about his birthday and I just had a bad feeling that any sort of interrogation, as innocent as it would've been, would've spooked him. I mean, he was *smiling*, Sho. He was *happy*. The entire time he's been with us, I haven't ever seen him acting so much like— I don't know... a regular kid, I guess? I wanted to keep it that way. And, after *everything* recently, I though he just deserved to just relax."

Mineta gets expelled within the first two weeks of dorm life, right before the Provisional Licensing exam. It's been a long time coming—with how he acts around the girls. He's been gross since the first day, but this had been a whole new level that just couldn't be brushed off by the girls, or the guys.

Izuku can't find it in himself to be sympathetic for the guy.

He'd made crude comments all year, since the literal first day of classes, but it's hard to come back from somehow managing to *drill a peeping hole* in the wall that had a full view of the girl's communal showers.

It's disgusting. Izuku feels sick at the thought.

It's Sero who finds the pervert foaming at the mouth as Hagakure and Ashido step in to shower after their jog. Izuku himself hears the shouting from his dorm room, and he, like the rest of the class, all rush towards the heart of it.

Least to say the girls are rightfully upset when everyone gathers, Ashido and Hagakure in nothing but towels that they clutch tightly, while Yaoyorozu and Uraraka comfort them.

They're all genuinely disgusted and appalled at the small, Mineta height eyehole in the wall.

What a repulsive breach of privacy—he's supposed to be a *Hero*. Mineta clearly only thinks with one part of his body, and it certainly *isn't* his brain. The teen in question is further down the hall, wrapped tightly in a cocoon of Sero's tape and stuck to the wall near the ceiling so even if he *could* escape it's a long drop.

When the girls have calmed enough so no one's shaking, either with fear or anger, the six of them all head to the communal showers so Hagakure and Ashido can shower in peace (Sero puts a piece of take over the hole on the outside, but Izuku can tell one of the girls is still covering it on the other side just by how the patched hole darkens. Good.)

They leave Mineta in the hall and gather in the common area, a general blanket of unease, anger and disgust covering the room. Izuku subtly, yet urgently, invites Shota to join them via text, and gets a fast response of '*On my way*.'

Shota arrives just as the girls do, the man taking just one second to survey over everyone before his nose wrinkles and his eyes harden into something dangerous, "where's *Mineta*?"

Shota makes quick work of getting Mineta out of the dorms—not even bothering to unwrap him from the tape and instead just adds a layer of capture weapon that he uses to drag the teen out.

"Everyone stay here," Shota demands softly, scanning over all the teens before turning back towards the door, "I'll be right back."

He returns promptly, and lets the group explain what exactly went down. Sero explains what he saw, nose wrinkling in a sneer, and Hagakure and Ashido tell him when they noticed— spotting the peep

hole only because of the commotion on the other side of the wall. Yaoyorozu is the one who shows Shota the hole in the wall.

The man narrows his eyes as he crouches enough to study the hole, even pulling the tape enough to determine that it sees directly into the shower cubicles. A grim look settles on his face as he stands to his full height. He replaces the tape, and Izuku just knows the sight of the hole offends the man. It offends him as well.

“He’s done stuff like this before,” Iida explains tightly when they’re all back in the common area, “but never like this. We should’ve told you sooner, Sensei. The comments were... unsavory, but we’d *never* let him do anything further if we’d known his intentions.”

“I always thought he was just kidding around,” Kaminari breathes out, looking apologetically at the girls all squished together on and around the loveseat. “I’m sorry he wasn’t. I... I know I was sorta his friend, but I’d never do anything like this! I respect you guys—I-I mean, *girls* — it’s just gross what he did!”

“It’s fine, Kaminari,” Jirou quips with a small upward tick of her lips, “don’t short circuit on us. You didn’t do anything. Mineta did.”

“I talked with him though!” Kaminari cries out, “I thought he was just admiring you guys too! You’re all pretty, so I thought— but I-I didn’t *think* he’d—”

“We knew you were just *crushing*,” Ashido smiles teasingly, “it was cute, Denki-kun! We never thought you were anything like Mineta. Don’t worry!”

The girls all mumble agreements, and Kaminari’s cheeks light up in a blush at the attention.

Shota calls back everyone’s attention, looking unamused at the teenaged teasing. Izuku almost laughs.

“Were there any other incidents I should know about?” Shota asks from where he’s stood before them all, able to scan the class easily. “Anything at all. Any time he’s done something that made anyone uncomfortable?”

“Well,” Izuku bites the inside of his cheek, “t-there was the hot springs incident. I meant to bring that up to you but—well...” Izuku doesn’t want to remind anyone of the camp. It’s too soon, considering not even an entire month had passed yet.

“What happened?” Shota asks calmly, though his eyes are dark with anger.

“He scoured a wall,” Kirishima explains grimly, “so he could see the girls naked on the other side. We tried to talk him outta it, but he wouldn’t listen— just leapt, using his Quirk to climb and then he was halfway up the wall. He didn’t see anything though.”

“Kota-kun was the one who stopped him,” Izuku offers up with a sheepish smile, “and then I think he lost his balance and fell. I brought him into Mandalay after that.”

“So, this isn’t his first offense,” Shota summarizes tensely. The man blows out a slow breath as he straightens up. He offers a quick bow to the class, “thank you for the information, I’ll keep everything you’ve brought to my attention in mind when we determine his punishment. Rest assured he will no longer cause any of you any harm, and I apologize for letting this carry on as long as I have.”

“It really isn’t your fault, Sensei,” Iida frowns, “we all should’ve done better to ensure our classmates were safe. We never took him seriously, but we should have and that’s our fault.”

“No,” Shota shakes his head as he stands back to his full height, “I am the adult, and I’m also your teacher and current guardian. The fault is my own for not keeping a closer eye on the situation, and I don’t want any of you taking any blame. You’re all my responsibility— Mineta included.”

“But Sensei!” Ashido pouts, launching up from her spot and trapping Shota in a hug. “He never did anything when you were around, so you couldn’t have known if none of us said anything! So, you can’t take the blame! He’s just a sneaky little pervert! I don’t blame you, Sensei.”

The girls once again all mumble agreement, as Hagakure joins Ashido in hugging the man.

Izuku can’t help but think they’re seeking silent assurance from the man, and he seems to come to the same conclusion as he easily offers it by wrapping a light arm around each of them.

He still looks faintly uncomfortable, but he’s trying at least.

Shota shoots Izuku a light glare when the green-haired teen grins almost teasingly at him.

When the two girls finally tug away from the man, Shota offers up the idea of a movie day while he sorts out the situation. Everyone's quick to jump on the idea, offering their own favorite movies up for the class to decide on, while Kacchan and Kirishima disappear into the kitchen to make popcorn.

Shota is gone for a couple hours, and when he returns, he's joined by a troubled looking Detective Tsukauchi. The Detective manages a light smile as everyone looks towards him in confusion, while Shota gestures to Sato, who has the remote, to pause it.

"Mineta will no longer be a student at this school," Shota announces after Sato pauses the film, "he has been expelled, and an investigation has been opened against him. That said, this is not something you need to concern yourselves with. This is a matter for me, as your teacher, and the police to handle."

Shota looks around, gauging the students' emotions through their expressions, "I would like to warn you all right now, that within the next half an hour, we will be escorting Mineta in to collect his belongings. Following this, he will no longer have access to the campus, so none of you will have to deal with him again. If you feel unsafe, or don't want to see him, please stay with your friends and put yourselves somewhere you feel comfortable and safe—whether that's your dorm room, or a friend's. I'll be waving away your curfew tonight, so you're welcome to stay with your friends. I trust you'll all still respect the rules and remain in your own wings of the building."

The Detective nods, "Eraser has told me of the incidents you all shared with him, and I will be looking into everything. With what I know now, I have enough to open an investigation on your ex-classmate—but there is a possibility I might need some statements from you students. I can go off of Eraserhead's word for right now, but statements would help a lot as well. We'll follow procedure, since you're all minors, and you'll have the option of having either Eraser or your guardians sit with you."

"You're also all welcome to come to me with anything you'd like to share, and I will pass it onto the Detective," Shota offers softly, "if anything comes to mind that you wish to report, please don't hesitate to come find me."

Detective Tsukauchi nods in agreement.

When Mineta is brought in, most of the girls and a few of the boys are

gone. Yaoyorozu is the only girl who chose to stay, sitting stiffly beside Iida and almost surrounded by the remaining boys like Mineta is a threat to her, even sandwiched between a Pro Hero and a police detective.

The remaining students glare as Mineta was he escorted through the dorms to collect his belongings. He's escorted out just as fast.

Shota keeps between Mineta and the rest of the students the entire time.

"I should be going—I have to get to the station with Mineta before his guardians arrive," Detective Tsukauchi gives the remaining students a tiny, sympathetic smile, "what Mineta's done is a serious offense and could very well result in fines and possible jailtime. I'm glad we caught this before it escalated into something more. We'll be in touch, Eraser."

Shota waves the man off with a tired hand, glancing back into the room.

Somehow, when the rest of the students return, they manage to convince their teacher into joining them for another movie— and following that, an entire class sleepover.

Shota looks exasperated where he's trapped on the couch surrounded by Ashido, Hagakure and Uraraka. The seats are taken fast, while Izuku is up grabbing a water bottle from the kitchen, so when he returns to see everything taken— including most of the spaces on the floor in front of the couches— he simply settles at Shota's feet and leans back against him cheekily.

He throws his head back against his guardian's knees, grinning upside down up at Shota.

With an exasperated huff, Shota lets his legs stretch out, resigning himself to his fate of being stuck watching a movie with them.

Izuku smiles the entire movie. He's not sure when he falls asleep, but he's lulled into sleep by the soft snores of his classmates, leaning against Shota's knee as gentle fingers tousle through his hair.

It's the best sleepover he's ever been to.

The next day the hole in the wall has been patched.

Before Izuku knows it, the Provisional licensing exam is upon them.

The morning is slow—Shota had given them warning the evening before so everyone would be ready for when the bus arrived. That included assuring the students that he would *not* be making them traverse through the forest to get to the exam, even as he tried not let that tiny amused smile threatening to curl onto his lips through.

The class is up and ready before the time Shota even makes his way down, and everyone is nervously yet excitedly enjoying a breakfast of pancakes the Sato made for them. Izuku thinks he's channeling his nerves into something useful, and he won't complain as he enjoys the fluffy breakfast treat.

When Shota finally comes down, he cocks a surprised eyebrow at the sight of them all dressed and ready to go, costume suitcases tucked under their chairs and all almost finished eating.

"The bus will arrive in half an hour— everyone be outside at the bus loading area at five-to, got it?"

There's an enthusiastic cheer of 'Yes, Sensei!', which pleases Shota enough that he simply nods and disappears out the front doors.

Oboro is near vibrating at Izuku's side, chatting excitedly about his own licensing exam. Izuku half listens to him, and half listens to the conversation going on around him. He's trying to keep note of what Oboro is saying—what to expect, since Shota hadn't really explained much, but he also thinks the exam probably would've changed over the years. It's been fourteen, maybe fifteen years since Oboro took the exam, so Izuku's not sure his information is trust worthy. Still, it can't hurt to make note of what they ghost is saying.

When the designated time their Sensei gave them approaches, everyone crowds in the genkan; all rushing to put their shoes on and get outside where Shota is undoubtedly waiting.

The bus ride is a couple hours long, and it's filled with nervous energy. Shota sits on the first seat, only glancing back every so often, and Oboro sits beside his school friend considering Todoroki had taken the seat beside Izuku when they'd got on the bus.

Everyone is still vibrating with nerves as Shota leads them off the bus and they all gather to collect their costumes.

"Eraser!" Izuku turns to see who called out, entirely too aware of how

Shota had bristled at his side. The man heaves a sigh as a woman bounds towards them, the entire class stopping to look, “I know that scowl anywhere! I saw you on TV, and at the Sports Festival, but it’s been a while since we’ve met up!”

Izuku takes a second to look between the two of them— from Shota’s scowl, to the woman’s— *Ms Joke*, his brain whispers in awe— cheerful smile. The two have a staring contest for just a second, Shota’s eyes narrowed while Ms Joke is just grinning almost teasingly.

“Joke,” Shota greets gruffly.

Izuku watches, head cocked slightly as the woman settles in front of Shota, closer than not many people would ever dare to get. His guardian’s shoulder slump and he tucks his hands in his pockets, eyes narrowed in a way Izuku doesn’t quite understand.

Oboro is snickering beside Izuku, and the teen glances over quickly.

“Let’s get married!”

Izuku nearly chokes on his own tongue in surprise, attention shooting back to where Shota looks torn between annoyance and exasperated, as the Heroine grin brightens. There’s a playful light in her eyes.

“No.” Shota drones, like it’s a familiar thing.

Ashido makes a cooing noise at Izuku’s side, but he can’t look away from his guardian and Ms Joke. He doesn’t know what’s happening. Is she flirting with him? Does she not know that Shota and Hizashi are married? Should Izuku be concerned here?

He turns his head faintly to where Oboro is watching him and the ghost lets out a snort of laughter, “they’re friends, dude. Well, sorta. Wellll, I guess they’re really more of acquaintances. *Work buddies*. Sho’s known Fukukado since way early in his Hero career.”

Izuku’s mouth forms an ‘o’ shape, but he doesn’t breathe a sound.

That… makes sense.

But still, what kind of relationship do they have? Shota doesn’t look too interested, but Ms Joke doesn’t seem to be taking the hint. She’s smiling widely like it’s a game— and maybe it is? Plus, Shota isn’t directly telling her to leave, or to leave him alone, so he must be used to this.

Despite the rejection, Ms Joke hunches over and laughs, “you’re a real riot, buddy! I’m supposed to be the funny one!”

Shota looks quite unamused, which is odd considering Ms Joke’s Quirk is Outburst. It makes people laugh, but she just can’t seem to get him to even smile. Shota is a tough nut to crack though.

“As usual,” the man regards his tiredly, “you’re impossible, Joke.”

“C’mon, Eraser,” she teases easily, inching closer to him; smile never waning, “imagine it! If I was your wife, you’d have a future full of constant laughter! I know *I* dream of it!”

“That sounds like an actual nightmare,” Shota quips back drily.

Joke bends over once again into another fit of laughter, and Shota just watches uninterested, unmoving from his slumped form. Izuku’s wide eyes flick between them, shifting awkwardly on his feet as he observes them. The interactions. Their words.

There’s something about watching her openly flirt with his guardian that puts him on edge, and he doesn’t even know why. It’s innocent, isn’t it? It’s obviously familiar to Shota but...

But... does Hizashi know?

Is he aware that this Hero is flirting with Shota when he’s not around?

“You two seem close,” Asui observes, and Izuku agrees with the notion. Shota is definitely exasperated, but in the way he is with the teachers at Yuuei, and Izuku’s classmates— not in the way like when he encounters someone he’s not particularly fond.

“Our agencies were near each other,” Joke offers dramatically. Shota’s eyes roll in annoyance as he shakes his head lightly. Izuku thinks he’s probably heard this same schtick multiple times. How often does Ms Joke flirt with him? Has he not told her he’s married? Does she not *care*? “As young Heroes striving to make a difference in the world, a mutual *love* bloomed—”

“No, it didn’t,” Shota refutes in a huff. Izuku feels his guardian's eyes flick over in the direction of the students, easily singling in on Izuku. The teen blinks, and the man blows out a breath.

The woman whips back to Shota before he can add anything else, grinning widely, “I do miss your quick retorts!”

“Really?” Shota drawls, “can’t say I missed your jokes.”

“He’s so harsh!” Ashido cries out. “But I think Sensei *likes* her! They’re so cute!”

“Please don’t speculate about our Sensei,” Iida scolds under his breath, probably so Shota doesn’t hear, the engine-Quirked teen shooting Izuku a knowing look. “Sensei’s personal matters aren’t of our concern.”

“You’re a stick in the mud,” Ashido pouts, sticking her tongue out.

“They are cute,” Hagakure adds with a laugh, “Mina’s right!”

“I think we should listen to Iida,” Todoroki shrugs, “Sensei doesn’t look happy.”

“Yeah,” Izuku clears his throat, “it’s a bit weird talking about Sensei like this.”

“You wound me!” Ms Joke whines dramatically, placing her hand against her chest like she’s trying to protect her heart. The words draw Izuku’s attention away from his classmates and back to his teacher and Ms Joke. “You’re an absolute *hoot*, Eraser! I know you love my jokes!”

Izuku’s eyes flick between the two of them as Shota lets his gaze settle back on the other Pro.

“*Love* and *suffer through* are two very different things.”

Joke bursts into another bout of laughter, wiping at a stray tear. Joke straightens up and inches closer to Shota, which is followed by the man gritting his teeth.

At least she backs off when she realizes the tension that’s different to the irritation he’d expressed up until that point. Shota’s eyes flick back to the students as if it’s a warning, and following that, after a second of confusion, green eyes jump to the crowd of Yuuei students as well.

Ms Joke scans over them calculatingly before she catches Izuku’s gaze. The two of them keep contact for a second before Ms Joke is whipping back to Shota and grinning widely. There’s a different sort of humor in her eyes now, more teasing then playful.

“Not in front of your students then?” Joke coos with far more energy,

“I would hate to embarrass you in front of your *kids*! I guess my love for you will have to wait! We’ll have to rendezvous after the exam then!”

“No, we won’t. Will you stop?” the man sighs before turning to the students, “listen up. I want everyone to grab their costume cases and get inside for orientation. Don’t be late.”

Ms Joke’s students join in just as Iida and Yaoyorozu are unpacking and handing out everyone’s Hero costume cases, so they all talk a little bit as everyone waits for their belongings. They all seem nice enough, but Izuku is still thinking about how Ms Joke was acting around Shota.

They’re talking still, quietly. Shota still looks just as annoyed as when he’d first gotten stuck in the conversation, while Ms Joke is grinning brightly, nudging Shota playfully every time she glances over in the student’s direction.

Izuku can’t help but think it's a little strange.

Soon all the students are trailing into the building—there's not much order, no matter how hard Iida is trying to corral everyone. The Ketsubutsu students grab their own costumes, and join 1-A. Everyone is nice but... maybe a little *too* nice.

“Nervous?” Izuku startles, looking back at where Oboro is leaning against the bus.

“A bit,” Izuku replies under his breath. He looks around to make sure there’s no one in the vicinity—his classmates are all filing into the building now, and Shota has gotten gradually more annoyed where Ms Joke suddenly looks a little more serious then Izuku thinks he’d ever seen in the media. Huh.

“Don’t worry about them,” Oboro huffs when he catches where Izuku’s looking. “She’s probably just teasing him for being a sadist, in a serious sort of way.”

“What?” Izuku blinks, “why?”

“‘zuku, buddy, did you, uh, notice how you didn’t have to *introduce yourself* to anyone here? How none of you Yuuei kids had to? Your competitors just knew who you were, right?”

“Well, yeah,” Izuku blinks in confusion, “I didn’t even think about it.

A lot of people just know who we are, they probably saw us at the Sports Festival. It was broadcasted live and—"

Izuku cuts himself off with a sharp inhale.

Oh God.

"They... they know our Quirks. They saw us use our Quirks— our fighting styles. They know what we can do, and we know *nothing* about them."

"You catch on fast," Oboro laughs lightly, scratching the back of his neck. "Yeah."

"He didn't warn us!" Izuku breathes out frantically, "they know everything about us! Oh no. H-he *is* a sadist!"

"It's a learning opportunity," Oboro shrugs lightly, "you'll be on the news when you're a Hero. Your *Quirk* will be known; your *face* will be known and your *fighting style* will be known. Villains will have access to all the information just from news coverage alone and they'll be ready."

"It's a good lesson," Izuku decides, shoving down the beat of *betrayal*, "it's a safe environment for us to learn something like this—the other student will go hard on us, but they're not trying to kill us like a villain would. I... I understand it, but still, a *heads up* would've been nice. We're walking into a 1-A versus everyone else fight. He's basically sending us into a trap."

"Yep," Oboro snorts a laugh, "that's exactly how it'll play out too. Happens every year. Shota just likes seeing how far you students have come— and how you overcome obstacles using your wits and skills. It's totally sadistic, he definitely could've given you a heads up, but it's also a good way to see where you're all at in a controlled environment where he's not the mediator, or the judge."

"I get it," Izuku nods, biting at his bottom lip. "Y'know you're not allowed to even step foot in the exam, right? Under no circumstances. I'm serious this time—we will not be having another Sports Festival incident."

"Yeah," the ghost wilts sadly, "I assumed. At least Joke's here to be funny, since Shota's a bore who just watches and silently nitpicks. I would love to hear his thoughts, honestly."

Izuku wrinkles his nose at the mention of the Ms Joke. He's still not sure what to feel— there's that Hero worship he has, but then there's the sinking feel that she was flirting with a married man.

"Problem Child."

Izuku startles hard, almost dropping his costume case—and it's just then that he realizes he's facing the bus, talking to *nothing*. His peers are gone, and most everyone is already in the building. And he's about to get in *trouble*—

"Are you alright?"

The question throws him for a loop, and he's quick to nod as he clutches his costume to his chest.

Shota doesn't look convinced, gaze dipping briefly to where Izuku's arms squeeze the case, before lifting back to his face. He doesn't say anything, which Izuku is grateful for.

"I'm sorry about Joke," Shota offers, "I didn't know she was going to be here with her second-years, or I would've given you a heads up about what she's like."

"Oh, um, don't apologize, you couldn't have known! Just..." Izuku swallows, "b-but was... um, was she *flirting* with you?"

"Unfortunately," Shota sighs. He glances back towards the building, wrinkling his nose as he turns back to the teen, gesturing him forwards, "we'll walk and talk. You can't be late for orientation, alright?"

"R-right!" Izuku yelps, taking a couple steps forwards until he falls into step with his guardian. They're quite for a couple paces until Izuku manages to organize his thoughts, "are you friends?"

"Yes," Shota doesn't hesitate. "I wasn't fond of her at first, but, then again, I wasn't fond of Hizashi at first either. They're just so *loud*. You should hear the two of them in a room together—it's just *great* when Hizashi loses control of his Quirk as he laughs because of her Quirk. Busted my eardrum."

"Can confirm: was loud," Oboro tells him, keeping pace at Izuku's other side, "the ringing in my ears didn't stop for days, and I'm a ghost."

Izuku swallows a laugh.

“So Hizashi... knows Ms Joke too? Does she... is she, um, l-like that when he’s around too?”

“She’s always like that, Kid,” Shota snorts a laugh, “but yes. Hizashi knows her as well. They talk more regularly than Joke and I do. And she’s like that, flirty and over-the-top with anyone she likes. She’s just made it her personal *mission* to get me to laugh whenever she sees me. She’s tamer with everyone else.”

“Oh,” Izuku breathes out, shoulders losing some of the tension.

Oboro chuckles at Izuku’s side, “I told you it was nothing!”

“What, were you worried I was cheating on Hizashi?” Shota teases knowingly.

Izuku keeps quiet, not wanting to offend his guardian. He had been a little worried, even if Shota wasn’t reciprocating the advances.

“Don’t worry, Problem Child,” Shota bumps his shoulder against Izuku’s lightly, “nothing is going on with Joke. Trust me. It’s just a big joke— obviously on brand for her. She’s been doing this since I met her; literally proposed like that the first time we met. She didn’t even know my Hero name the first time that idiot asked me to marry her. Hizashi got a kick outta it when I told him.”

“Really?” Izuku cocks his head.

His guardian gives a hum, “and Hizashi is very aware of her odd humor as well. She proposed to me at our *wedding* too— after our vows. And *then*, after I said no, she proposed to Hizashi as well. I know what it looked like today, Problem Child, so I’m proud of you for looking out for Hizashi. But you can rest assured that I have no interest in anyone else, and I’d honestly rather throw myself off a building then marry Joke.”

Izuku snorts a laugh at the dramatics, “that’s harsh.”

“That’s *realistic*,” Shota huffs. “I like her enough as a friend, but I couldn’t deal with her constantly. Hizashi is definitely enough brightness for me.”

“Aw,” Izuku coos, laughing brightly when his guardian shoves him away with a playful scowl.

“Don’t make me expel you,” the man threatens without any heat or intent, “besides, now I have you as well, sunshine child. Bright husband, sunny child.”

Izuku doesn’t know how to respond when it suddenly turned around onto him, so he just tries not to let his entire face light up in a light flush as he looks away from his guardian.

The man lets out a soft exhale that sounds suspiciously like a laugh, as he ruffles Izuku’s hair, “now, go join your peers. Orientation will be starting soon. Do your best, aright? I’ll be watching from the stands.”

“I’ll try my best!”

Shota really hadn’t expected to find his foster son and Bakugou physically fighting on the night after the Licensing exam.

The exam had gone well, with seventeen of his students passing and getting their licenses. He’d been proud that so many had passed, especially with everyone targeting them. It truly is an almost unfair exam for Yuuei students, but the thing about Heroics is that being a Hero is not going to be *fair*.

It’s a lesson better learned early, then learned late.

His initial worry when he sees the notification on his security feed, is that Bakugou is angry that he didn’t get his license like Izuku and the majority of the class, and that he’s taking it out on Izuku.

It doesn’t make much sense— the two of them had been on relatively good terms since they’d been kidnapped together, but it's still a nagging thought in the back of his mind as he loops his capture weapon over his head and rushes out the door.

He’s already tired from being trapped on a bus with nineteen insane children for a couple hours, and to make matters worse, Hizashi had be asked to aid in a surveillance mission with the police so he’s not even in the apartment that evening.

It’s really just the icing on top of the cake that Yagi’s standing between him and his fighting students—he can hear the explosions and crackles of Bakugou’s Quirk from here, and the fun-sized number one Hero is standing in his way with *placating* hands like that will help *calm* Shota at all.

Shota only hesitates on rushing to stop the fight when Yagi tells him that they're fighting over All Might's retirement, and not the exam standings. He's confused—rightfully so, but he gives Yagi the benefit of the doubt and waits like he suggested.

Yagi knows Izuku and Bakugou well, and as well as Shota himself knows his students, he doesn't understand *this*, but Yagi clearly does. So, as much as he doesn't really want to, he takes a step back and lets the number one Pro handle it.

Until it comes to patching the kids up and doling out punishments. His teeth are gritted as he perches on the coffee table before the two of them, disinfecting wounds and patching them up.

They're in the 1-A living room, because a scuffle is nothing to go to the infirmary for.

The first thing he's asked was if either of them needed medical attention, and they'd both just guiltily shaken their heads. Plus, Recovery Girl would probably scold *him* for waking her up for something like this.

And they don't get the privilege of her Quirk for fighting like two kindergarteners throwing fits without supervision. They'll learn from the scrapes and bruises.

"Since you threw the first punch," Shota points sternly at a scowling Bakugou, "you get four days of house arrest."

The kid grits his teeth and looks away, but doesn't bother voicing complaints.

"And you," Shota turns to Izuku, who's cowering slightly. He pushes down the worry; this is his *student* right now, not his *foster son*. He'll get the same punishment as any other student to break curfew and fight without supervision. "You get three days for fighting him."

Izuku just nods slowly, not daring to look at Shota. He's probably still glowing with anger.

It's always these two, isn't it?

Neither boy offers anything else—no excuses, or apologies past those first initial ones. They don't try to get a lesser punishment, or even weasel out of said punishment. They know they're in the wrong, and that's really all Shota can hope for. Especially when it comes to these

two.

“I’m disappointed in both of you— I don’t know *what* you were thinking, but if you need to blow off some steam come to me and I can set you up in a training room. If either of you try anything like this again, or I catch you doing anything even *remotely*close to what you did tonight, you will not be getting a third chance, understood?”

“Y-yes, Sensei!” Izuku squeaks. Shota tries not to look at the bandages on his face.

“Got it,” Bakugou breathes out through clenched teeth.

They’re both dismissed— Yagi as well. Bakugou is quick to get up and leave towards the dorm rooms with heavy footfalls, and Yagi takes his leave with an apologetic smile shot in Shota’s directions, as well as light pat to Izuku’s shoulder.

Shota boxes up the rest of the first aid supplies he used, clicking the clamps into place and setting the box on the table. He blows out a breath, and regards the last person in the room.

Izuku hasn’t moved.

“Anything to add?” He asks quietly as he sits at his foster son’s side. He throws an arm over the back of the couch just faintly brushing against Izuku’s squared up shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” the boy whispers, pulling at his own fingers nervously.

“I know,” Shota sighs. And he does. He knows they’re both sorry for what they did. For fighting like they had over *All Might’s retirement*, for whatever reason. He doesn’t doubt it’s something they both probably needed, but it doesn’t make it right. “I can’t say it’s okay, Kid, because it’s *not.* One of you could’ve been hurt, and I didn’t even know either of you left the dorms until I got a security notification. I get needing to blow off steam, but fighting a classmate after dorm curfew is not the way to do it.”

“You sound like you’re more upset about the curfew,” Izuku glances sideways at Shota. He doesn’t look long, ducking his attention back to his lap when Shota glances in his direction.

“I am,” Shota tells him honestly. “I mean, you shouldn’t have been fighting periodt. And certainly not without supervision. That’s not the way to resolve things with your peers, especially as a Hero, but I know

you're both teenagers still. Your emotions and hormones are all over the place and I *get* needing to just work off stressors and emotions. That's logical.

"What I'm really mad about is the fact that you both *knew* what you were doing was wrong, and yet you still did it. You went against the rules I've placed in the dorms to keep you all safe, as well as Yuuei's code of conduct. You're damn lucky Yagi pleaded your case, Problem Child. You can't be behaving like that— not with a provisional license."

Izuku gives a light nod, mouth twisted in a thoughtful curve.

They settle into a comfortable silence. It's late—past room curfew by a while now too, but Shota's not too worried about that. Not when he's sitting right here with the kid. Room curfew is more or less to just keep the kids on a schedule—it's not like he'll punish someone for being unable to sleep, or for coming to the kitchen for a late-night snack or something.

Izuku is quiet at his side. It's that thoughtful sort of quiet that the kid usually does before he starts mumbling out facts or plans or whatever else clever tidbits he shares.

"Kacchan... blames himself," Izuku pauses, scratching idly at his thigh, "that... that's why we were fighting."

Shota glances down in surprise, having not expected the boy to say anything more.

Izuku still isn't looking at him, hands still wringing anxiously in his lap.

Shota's gaze tracks over the spattering of scars on the boy's hands, wrists and what he can see of his arms below his sleeve. "For what?"

"All Might's retirement," the boy finally glances over. His eyes are watery, but he's not crying. Shota's heart still cracks. "And I get it, I-I was there too. I sorta... *I get it.* He was there saving us. All Might was trying to rescue us, and now he can't use his Quirk anymore. If we hadn't... if we hadn't of gotten kidnapped in the first place, he'd probably still be able to..." the kid's voice waivers off.

"Did you *ask* to get kidnapped?" Shota asks easily when the boy's voice dies off.

"*What?*" the kid's head jerks up, and he's staring wide-eyed at Shota like he's lost his mind. "No! Of course not! I was just trying to get Kacchan back!"

"And Bakugou?" Shota questions. "What about him? Did he phone up Shigaraki and ask to get targeted by a bunch of villains and taken from a school trip? Did *he* ask to be kidnapped?"

"No," Izuku wrinkles his nose like he's offended for Bakugou's sake, "that sounds ridiculous."

"It is," Shota agrees, "just as ridiculous as blaming yourself for things that happened *to* you is. You didn't get a choice in the matter. You didn't *decide* to get kidnapped. It just happened. That's *not* your fault. That's not Bakugou's fault. All Might is a grown man, and a seasoned Pro Hero. He did what he was supposed to do, and that was getting the both of you home to us."

"But if we hadn't of been taken in the first place—"

"Izuku," Shota sighs softly, arm snaking down carefully until his arm is across the boy's shoulders. He gives a light squeeze of the kid's shoulder, and the boy promptly pitches into Shota's side. "Yagi would've lost his Quirk at some point or another either way. He was hurt in that fight a long time ago, and he hasn't been the same since. I'm sure you already know that thought. Chronic injuries like that get worse as time goes on. You can't heal from that—it was only a matter of time. At some point or another, he would've needed to hang up his costume for good. Everyone does."

"But—"

"It is neither of your faults," Shota tells him sternly, but not unkindly. "What happened to All Might was years of Hero work and not knowing when to take a break. It was a villain fight that went south *years* ago that's finally catching up to him. It's illogical to blame yourselves for something that was inevitable. He was going to retire at some point. And it's not like you forced him to fight that villain— he made the decision that we *all* would've made given the circumstances. He *chose* to fight and protect. He chose putting a dangerous villain behind bars instead of to saver what was left of his Quirk. He knew what he was doing, Kid."

Shota doesn't say anything as Izuku presses in closer to his side, nose and forehead settling against the side of Shota's chest. All he can see are ruffled green curls, but he can feel the boy breathing against him.

Without a thought, the man lifts his hand to knot through the curls, scratching lightly in the way that always calms Hizashi. Izuku relaxes slightly.

“I just,” his words are muffled in Shota’s shirt, “I feel bad.”

“I can’t tell you how to feel, and what you are feeling is *valid*,” Shota pushes Izuku’s bangs back so he can mostly see vibrant green eyes staring up at him, “but it’s not something that you should feel bad about. You were a victim. Bakugou was a victim. You don’t blame a victim for what happens to the person trying to help them.”

“What do you mean?” Izuku asks softly, voice still muffled.

“I mean you don’t blame a fire survivor if a fire fighter gets burned pulling them out of the building. You don’t blame someone getting mugged if the mugger shoots the cop trying to arrest them. Bad things happen, Izuku, and they happen to good people. You’re the victim. Shigaraki and All for One are the ones to blame.”

“That... makes sense,” the teen mumbles. “I’d never blame a victim for something out of their control.”

“It always feels different when it’s you,” Shota tells him quietly but honestly, “you will always be your biggest critic. But you’ve got to remember you’re still a kid. You’re a teenager *learning* to be a Hero— you're not a Hero yet. Give yourself some leeway.”

“I’ll try,” Izuku whispers. “I think Kacchan needs to hear this too.”

“He will,” Shota snorts a laugh as he tightens his hold on the kid so it’s almost like a hug, “now that I know what you guys were blowing each other up over, I plan to tell him the same thing. And I hope Yagi also talks to both of you. You’ll feel guilty about a lot in this profession— as with any where you hold someone’s life in your hands at any given time, where what you do *affects them— but don’t blame yourself for things out of your control.”*

He feels the child nod against him, but Izuku doesn’t say anything.

“Are you really not upset we fought?” Shota glances down. “I-I mean, I know you’re upset about us fighting with no one else around but... you don’t mind?”

“I don’t,” Shota gives a one shouldered shrug. “I don’t mind so long as you’re doing it safe, in a controlled setting with someone else around.

Sparring is a great way to let off steam, and practice while doing it. But you need a mediator. You need someone to cut you off when you push too hard; you're both young, and things get out of control fast."

"So if we asked, you'd let us spar?"

Shota wrinkles his nose, offering another shrug, "I'm not enthusiastic that Bakugou's the one you choose, but so long as you are being safe and respectful of each other, I don't mind you two sparing after hours —with supervision, and definitely *before* curfew."

The boy giggles.

"Y'know, Shota," Izuku says softly, and it takes a second for Shota to notice the sleepy lull in his tone. "You're a really good teacher. I'm glad you're my homeroom teacher."

He can't help the smile that slips onto his face.

"Thanks, Problem Child. I'm glad you're my homeroom student. Now, it's late. Get up to your dorm—unless you want to come sleep up in the apartment tonight. Tomorrow is your day off, so I'm sure your friends will want to do something with you."

"Yeah," the boy yawns, finally pulling back from his guardian. He rubs at his eyes, "Todoroki-kun wanted to work on our math homework together and he'll probably speculate if I'm not in my room when he knocks."

The child pushes himself, standing on wobbly, tired legs. He yawns and rubs at his eyes before smiling tiredly at Shota, "goodnight, Shota."

"'night, Kid."

Shota's not expecting his phone to be what wakes him from his sleep. There's light streaming into the room from the half-shut curtain neither he nor Hizashi thought to close, so he knows it's morning, or close to it. Still doesn't make him feel any better as he untangles himself from the blankets.

It's more effect slipping away from Hizashi, who's even breaths ghost over the junction of his neck where his spooning significant other has wedged his face. He manages to put enough distance between them to grab his phone, rubbing at his tired eyes as he answers the call

without checking the caller ID.

“Eraserhead,” he answers the call in lieu of greeting pleasantries. He’s glad Hizashi had taken his hearing aids out to sleep, or he’d fear waking his husband up too. He doesn’t even know what time Hizashi managed to drag himself in to bed at, but he’d definitely be sleeping for a while. His sleep schedule is nowhere near as fucked as Shota’s is.

“Eraser,” Tsukauchi’s voice comes through, the call of Shota’s Hero name sounding tired and unsure.

It doesn’t surprise him that it’s the Detective on the other end of the line. Nezu, Nemuri, Tensei, Hizashi and Tsukauchi are the only ones who really call him, and the first three usually text unless it's an emergency.

Shota takes a second to pick the man’s tone apart—nervous, and almost annoyed. Anxious, yet composed and calm.

“Tsukauchi,” he greets finally, slipping away from Hizashi just enough to sit up and card his fingers through his hair in an attempt to get it out of his face, “what’s up? Why’re you calling so early—I’m not even a part of any of your current cases.”

“You’re going to want to be,” Tsukauchi offers grimly, and Shota can almost see the grimace in the man’s words. His interest is instantly piqued.

“Oh yeah?” Shota finally sits up the rest of the way, fully pulling away from the vice-grip Hizashi had on his waist, “and why’s that?”

He swings his legs out from under the covers and stands, leaving their room as cats circle underfoot. He eases the bedroom door shut, even if he knows Hizashi would sleep through an earthquake with his hearing aids out and his late night.

“I’ve been in contact with the Los Angeles police department recently,” Tsukauchi tells his slowly. “And they’ve arrested a person of interest from an arrest warrant we put out. Some favors were pulled by some powerful people. She’s here now, Eraser. I need you to come in. You’re the first person I’ve contacted—you're the one he *trusts*. I’ve already screwed up once, I’m not about to do it again. I’ll explain everything when you get here.”

“Wait, wait, Los Angeles?” Shota repeats in surprise, “why? What’s Los Angeles got to do with me— I've never even *been* to America. This is

more up All Might's alley. Or even Hizashi. And who is this '*he*' you're talking about? What the hell's going on here, Tsukauchi."

"Just trust me," Tsukauchi sighs, "it's sensitive, and I need you to be a part of this case. I know you'll have my head if you're *not* a part of this case— I've worked with you long enough to know that. This concerns you, and I'll need your help to get to the bottom of it."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Shota huffs out.

"It's about Midoriya, Aizawa."

Shota's entire world freezes. It's about Izuku? What about Izuku?

He knows better than to ask over the phone if Tsukauchi is already being this enigmatic. It's obviously something sensitive, and if it has to do with Izuku, it involves a minor.

"Fine," he says stiffly, already shuffling towards the bedroom to get dressed. "Give me twenty minutes and I'll be there."

"Awaiting your arrival," Tsukauchi replies, and then the line goes blank.

Chapter End Notes

I love me a good Shota and Izuku centric chapter. Shota being a soft guardian is my favorite thing, and I genuinely love platonic Joke and Eraser content. They're just so funny— complete opposite personalities!

Hope you're all excited for the next chapter! I'm very excited for it! I've been waiting so long to fit the next chapter in :D

Anywho, that's all from me! Lemme know what you thought of this chapter! I love to read what you all have to say— definitely the highlight of writing and sharing something like this! I'm very grateful for all the support you've all given this fic! I'm pretty sure within the next couple days we'll hit 10k kudos and I literally can't believe it! So, thank you all! <3

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! Welcome back!

I hope you're all ready for the newest chapter! I had a lot of fun with this one! Disclaimer that it's probably not accurate. I tried my best, but I know it's not! Let's just pretend all the police stuff is accurate— and who knows? Maybe it is in the MHA world!

Oh yeah! We got some more lovely fanart ! Thank you so much to Feathershine on Ao3 and feathershine8 on Tumblr! Art of the birthday chapter that really captures the mood! Fanart is always appreciated, so thank you!

The warning for this chapter is: I was mean :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota stands beside Tsukauchi outside the interrogation room. He stares through the two-way mirror, eyes narrowed on the lone person in the room. She's settled at the table, fingers laced together, but not cuffed.

The resemblance is uncanny.

Dark green, almost black hair. Sharp, calculating but warm viridian eyes. Freckled cheeks, and even from how she's sitting, Shota can tell she's on the shorter side. She's a bit on the pudgier side, but there's no question in his mind of who he's looking it.

She's so strikingly familiar.

Exactly like Izuku.

There's no doubt that this is the mother who'd left the poor kid without a home or any means to provide for himself. Just looking at her calm expression fills Shota with a sinking, stomach churning sort of anger.

She has the *nerve* to sit in that room and act calm knowing she abandoned her child.

"And how," Shota finally turns to his side, shoving the festering anger

down as he draws in Tsukauchi's attention with his words, "did you manage *this*? How the hell did you manage to get her here from *Los Angeles*? She left the country— we don't have any pull in America."

"Favors," Tsukauchi tells him stiffly, gaze flicking back to the woman.

Shota's glare directed at the detective doesn't lessen, instead, it sharpens at the lacking answer. Tsukauchi can try to sidestep as much as he wants, but Shota isn't one of his subordinates that'll be content with a shitty answer like that.

"Look," Tsukauchi drags a hand down his face, "I was just as surprised as you are now to get a long-distance call in *English*, reporting the arrest of one of our warrants. All I did was make flight arrangements and arrive at the airport to collect her with Sansa. We have... *friends* in high places, I guess."

"Yagi." Shota doesn't even need to take a second to think that one through, "Yagi pulled some strings over with his friends in America. What did Yagi even tell them? I don't think I've heard of this happening before— America doesn't seem like the type of place that would put this much work into another country's warrant. Especially not a child abandonment case. It's not exactly up there on severity, as awful as it is."

Tsukauchi offers a shrug, "I don't even know what he pulled. There was a bit of a language barrier between us— English Language wasn't my best subject, and they didn't know a lick of Japanese. The Chief I spoke to didn't have a translator on hand, and as soon as I heard the names *Midoriya Inko* and *All Might*, I thought it would be best to keep the circle of knowledge small. Last thing the poor kid needs is the media catching a whiff of this and blowing it out of proportion. His personal affairs should be just that: *personal*. Besides, I knew enough English to get us by."

Shota looks back towards the interrogation room. The small woman inside hasn't moved, but is now simply looking around the room. He wonders how long she's been in there, but doesn't feel the need to ask. Let her wait like Izuku had waited for her to come home.

"Have you talked to her yet?"

"No," Tsukauchi shakes his head, "I put out the warrant, sure, but I don't know enough about Midoriya, or his relationship with his mother to really know what to say here. I'll be honest, after Bakugou Mitsuki told me she left the country, I didn't *think* we'd ever really be

able to charge her. As soon as she left the country, she was essentially out of our territory."

"Right," Shota agrees through his teeth. "But you can charge her still, right? No matter what she says in that room— she will get at least *something*? She's here now. She's in *our* custody."

"Well," Tsukauchi worries his bottom lip, glancing back into the small interrogation room, "yes. She has broken the law. What we do know is that she abandoned a minor, and in doing so subjected him to the dangers of the world. There was a point where he was without a roof over his head and without access to basic necessities, so we've definitely got her for child abandonment and child endangerment. That's a hefty fine, and possible jailtime if we push and can prove it was intentional negligence."

"Good," Shota snaps, pulling his arms tauter across his own chest. "It was intentional. I don't know why she did it—why *now*, but she deliberately left him. Who packs up their belongings, leaves without a word and provides nothing of explanation besides a note that says *'I'm sorry'*?"

Shota doesn't wait for an answer from the detective, just presses on as he narrows his eyes dangerously on the woman. If looks could kill, she'd be keeling over. "I'll tell you who— someone who *knows* what they're doing is *wrong*. Midoriya Inko knew exactly what she was doing leaving that kid."

"I know," Tsukauchi breathes out, glancing sideways at Shota. "I'm just as upset as you are, Aizawa, but you need to tone it down before you go into that room, or I can't let you in. You can't be hostile in there. You want answers, and I know that, but I need you here as a Pro Hero working a case, not as that kid's guardian."

Tsukauchi hesitates, blowing out a sigh through his now, "as is, Aizawa, I shouldn't even be letting you in— you shouldn't even *be* here. You're too close to this, and it's too personal for you, but I know you're good at this, and you know more about this than anyone else I've got. You'll get to the bottom of this, and I'm willing to blur a line to do so."

"You? Blurring lines?" Shota asks drily.

"Yeah, well," the detective looks away bluntly. "Don't get used to it. It's about time I blur something in the *right* direction when it comes to Midoriya."

Shota wrinkles his nose as he narrows his eyes at the detective, “what the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Tsukauchi shakes his head, “doesn’t matter right now. What matters is getting the woman in that room to admit to the negligence. That’ll make this whole case a hell of a lot easier to close.”

Shota puckers his lips, glancing back into the interrogation room. The woman is looking towards the mirror now, almost looking directly at Shota. “Does Yagi know she’s here? He’s the one who pulled the strings; you’d think he’d be here. He’s got that soft spot for Izuku.”

“Not yet,” Tsukauchi shrugs. “He’s not technically a part of the case, even if he knows about it. Like I said, I don’t know what he did to get her arrested over there and brought back to Japan but this isn’t a Pro Hero case; it’s a police department case. She’s no villain, even if she isn’t exactly a law-abiding citizen.”

“You not letting All Might in on a case?” Shota huffs drily, “the world must be coming to an end if you two aren’t sharing secrets like usual.”

Tsukauchi raises an eyebrow, crossing his arms over his chest. He narrows his eyes at where Shota’s trying hard not to glare at him before the detective sighs deeply, trying to calm himself, as he reaches up to drag his fingers through his hair. “Have you had coffee yet today?”

“No,” Shota snaps, “I’d planned on sleeping in, but then you called and I didn’t even have a second to make myself one before coming here. It was a long day yesterday.”

“You definitely need one before going in there,” Tsukauchi jerks his chin towards the window, nose wrinkled. He then gestures to where the break room is, waving a hand in that general direction. Shota’s familiar with the precinct enough to know. “Go grab one and take a second to calm down. You’re an asshole when you don’t have coffee, and we can’t afford that. I need you level-headed; you’re not allowed to rip her apart or *I’ll* be in trouble.”

“Fine,” Shota huffs, letting his arms fall to his sides.

He’s only agreeing because he really does need the coffee. He’s almost upset with himself for deciding to forgo it when he’d stumbled past not one, but two, kitchens that morning. He just hadn’t expected to see the woman who left his foster kid high and dry sitting behind Tsukauchi’s two-way mirror. That might’ve ticked his irritation up a

couple *hundred* notches.

He feels a little better after his coffee. Or, *coffees* considering he chugs one while stood at the coffee pot before refilling his cup and shuffling his way back to the interrogation room where Tsukauchi is still waiting. He mumbles out a quick apology, which seems to be enough for Tsukauchi to determined he'll *play nice* enough.

Shota sips at his coffee as he follows Tsukauchi into the interrogation room. Seeing Midoriya Inko turn calmly to look at them does little to calm the own disgusted anger in his stomach, but he swallows it down with another sip of burning hot coffee as he settles beside Tsukauchi, across from the woman.

"Midoriya-San," Tsukauchi greets. "This is Pro Hero: Eraserhead, and he'll be sitting in on this interview, I hope you don't mind."

"I don't," Midoriya Inko replies with a dull smile, but a glance in Tsukauchi's direction provides that she very much *does*. Good, keep her on her toes. "I am curious why so many Pro Heroes are involved— I haven't done anything wrong. It was my husband, Hisashi, who was arrested for driving under the influence, and he only had two beers at the work function. I was only there to bail him out— why was I even arrested?"

"Before we get into all that," Tsukauchi flashes her a light smile, but Shota can see how fake it is, "I would just like to remind you that this conversation is being recorded, and I'd like to once again remind you that you have the right to an attorney, and if you can't afford one, one will be provided for you. Would you like one?"

"I don't need an attorney," Midoriya Inko shook her head, "I haven't done anything wrong. I still don't understand what I'm here for? I've never committed any crimes in Japan, I'm an upstanding citizen. You can ask anyone I know— Bakugou Mitsuki, my co-workers and neighbors. I moved to America—I've been there for the back couple months; what could I have possibly done?"

"So, you left the country?" Tsukauchi asks calmly. Shota knows it's just for the record.

"*Yes*," the woman scrunches her nose up, tone a little too testy for Shota's liking. "You already know that, Detective, I was brought here from America. I was arrested there, in the station, while innocently trying to bail out my husband. I didn't do anything wrong— and certainly nothing to deserve being sent back to Japan! This is

ridiculous!”

“Ma’am,” Tsukauchi lowers his own voice in an almost warning as the woman gets herself riled up.

Midoriya-San takes a calming breath, settling back in her chair, “I apologize.”

Tsukauchi takes a second to organize himself, “what can you tell us about your son?”

“Izuku?” the woman blinks in surprise, before understanding settles on her face. “This is about my son? What’s he done that lead to him being arrested? It’s a little *excessive* brining me back to Japan because of something he did—”

“Your son didn’t do anything,” Shota speaks for the first time. He tries not to glare.

Tsukauchi’s foot nudges harshly against his under the table and Shota comes to the conclusion he’s *not* trying hard enough. He forces his expression back to neutral.

“But this *is* about Izuku,” Tsukauchi tells her easily. “Midoriya-San, when is the last time you saw your son? Spoke to him?”

“Is he missing?” Midoriya-San's face goes cautiously blank. “I haven’t seen him in a couple months. I left him with a close friend when I went to America. My husband and I decided to give our marriage another try. Hisashi’s half American, so he’s been living and working overseas since Izuku was a little boy. I was planning on bringing my Izuku out to be with us again, as a family, when we were settled. I’ve missed him dearly, please tell me my baby is alright!”

The story sounds *good*, Shota knows that. It’s planned out and believable. There’s emotion in her voice, and she’s even managed to twist her expression into something of desperate worry. Midoriya Inko has obviously been planning this for a while— putting together the whole story. An *excuse*.

Too bad she didn’t take into account—

“Ma’am,” Tsukauchi winces, rubbing at his forehead, “please be honest. Lying in this interview, to a Detective, will do you no favors.”

“I am being hon—” Midoriya Inko pauses, eyes narrowing on

Tsukauchi. Something seems to click in her head as she slumps in her chair. “I forgot you told me you have a lie detector Quirk. Apologies, Detective. I really am being honest; I did intent to bring him along.”

Shota bites back a scoff. Still trying to sidestep his Quirk? Doesn’t work like that. A lie is a lie.

“You didn’t,” Tsukauchi frowns, lip twitching at the lie. Shota’s heart shatters at the blatant lie. She really did have no intention of contacting Izuku. “You *intended* to leave your son here in Japan, while you left to America. You *did not* leave your child with a family friend; you left him alone with no means to pay rent on the apartment leased under your name.

“You *did* leave your son here, and in doing so, you subjected him to the dangers of the world. He was homeless and struggled to provide for himself. You put him in harm's way. You abandoned your child without any means to provide for himself. You’ve had no contact with him since the start of the school year; the phone number both Izuku, and the school have to contact you had been disconnected.”

“He *has* been staying with a friend of mine—”

“Midoriya-San,” Tsukauchi shakes his head, “he hasn’t. We all know that. You’re lying to me. Your son was placed in foster care as soon as the school was made aware of his situation. He lived on the streets for three days after he was evicted from his home. You’re being charged with child abandonment and child neglect. You had a *warrant* out for your arrest— that's why you were brought back to Japan. You *endangered* the life of your son by leaving as you did. He is your legal responsibility until he turns eighteen, and you left him.”

The woman deflates, eyeing Tsukauchi like she’s finally coming to the conclusion that no matter how hard she tries, she can’t lie around his Quirk. “My son’s lived without me for far longer than I’ve been gone. I knew he’d be okay."

Shota glances over, looking for any sign of a lie, but his heart just shatters in his chest at the honesty. She really had abandoned the kid long before actually leaving. He knows Izuku had mentioned it briefly... but the proof of it from the source grabs at his heart and *twists*.

“Why?” The question is a good one, but Shota is surprised when he realizes that he’d been the one to speak it. Midoriya Inko turns to him, head cocked in confusion, so similar to how Izuku does it. He

swallows down the similarities and continues, “how… how can you just *leave* your child like that? Not care what happens to him? We could be having a very different conversation right now, if Yuuei High School hadn’t of stepped in.”

“I… I was *tired*,” the woman admits softly, and a quick glance at Tsukauchi determines that it’s the truth. “Izuku… he’s always been a lot. When he was little… he’s always been different. Do you know how hard it is to raise a *different* child? A different child in *this* world?”

“Different how?” Tsukauchi asks after he and Shota exchange a look.

“He’s Quirkless,” the woman offers with a shrug, “that’s… that’s always been part of the problem. Raising a Quirkless child in this day and age is hard. I struggled to provide for him. When he was diagnosed, Hisashi… that’s why he left to America in the first place. He wanted nothing to do with Izuku— wanted to surrender him and rid ourselves of him but I… he was just a little boy. I couldn’t just…”

The woman sucks in a breath, “I should’ve listened. We would’ve been happy without him; Hisashi and I. I love my husband, and he’s always been good to me. I picked Izuku, and I shouldn’t have. *I* would’ve been happier without him.”

Shota knows his face has once again pulled into a sharp expression, and the woman notices.

She ducks her shaking head, “*I’m sorry*, but it’s true. I… resent him. My son. I think I always have. It sounds awful, I know, but I *do*. I’ve raised him for fifteen years and I watched him. Grasping at dreams of being a hero, and getting picked on at school. I watched my child *hurt*, and there wasn’t anything I could do. You can’t fix Quirkless and I can’t make the world a nicer place.”

She brings her hands up to dry wash her face, sighing deeply as she does, “do you know how many phone calls I got from his school? How many hours of work I lost because I had to go pick him up? How I struggled to make ends meet? I always prayed he’d just be normal after some time. That he’d… grow up. But he never did.”

“Your son manifested a Quirk,” Shota tells her slowly. “He’s a great student, and he’s very smart. He’s grown a lot in just a couple months.”

“He did,” she agrees drily. “I saw. He got hurt at the Sports Festival. I saw clips of it online. Even in America I couldn’t escape my son’s face.

Pathetic, isn't it? I always wanted that for him; for him to be normal— like his classmates. To have a Quirk— like everyone else, but then I saw him breaking himself with it and I knew... I knew even if I had stuck around; I wouldn't be able to handle seeing him like that. I resent him but... he's still my baby. I still held him when he was born, and I raised him almost entirely alone. After Hisashi left, Izuku was all I had left.

"Seeing him hurt, hurts me. That probably sounds horrible, doesn't it? It sounds selfish— giving him up to protect myself from him. Giving him up so *I* can have a better life. I know I'm an awful mother, but I'm relieved I don't have to worry about him anymore. I'm so tired. I'm tired of *him*."

Shota manages to bite back a grimace, but Tsukauchi's face puckers for the both of them. The woman is no longer looking at either of them, eyes focused on where her own hands are interlaced and settled on the table top.

"So, you left your son because he was Quirkless?" Tsukauchi finally attempts after a second of silence for everyone to collect their thoughts.

Shota's sure he doesn't need to tell her how unjustifiable that sounds.

There is no light whatsoever that could make this look or sound even remotely reasonable. Shota's well aware of how many Quirkless kids are floating around in the foster system— how many Quirkless children are given up after being diagnosed, or are abandoned without a care. He knows the suicide rates of Quirkless children, teens and those who make it to adulthood. The disgusting laws revolving around Quirkless people.

Still, to raise a Quirkless child to fifteen—lulling them into a security like the one Izuku cautiously edges at whenever he even mentions his mother. She had chosen him, like she's saying, but why now? Why give him up *now*?

"That was a part of it," the woman whispers, thumbing over her other hand lightly. "I did struggle raising my son. His diagnosis made it difficult. Finding work— *keeping* work. Hisashi should've been sending child support, but we'd never officially divorced, and even if I did fight it, Quirkless children have different laws when it comes to stuff like that. He could've *fought* back, and I didn't want to lose him completely. He gave me the ultimatum when Izuku got diagnosed, and

I chose my son but that didn't mean I stopped loving my husband.

"He was just such a sweet little boy. Always so sweet, and clever and because of that I... had mixed feelings. At times I wouldn't give him up for the world—" Midoriya-San hesitates, looking up before looking away sharply, "and other times I wished I could've left him somewhere and walked away."

Shota sucks in a breath, eyes narrowing on the woman even if she's not even glancing in their direction.

"All because he was Quirkless?" Shota cocks an eyebrow, sipping desperately at his lukewarm coffee. He needs something to distract him from blowing up on this woman.

"No," Midoriya-San shakes her head. "I told you; it was a *part* of it. I think... if things were different. If my *son* was different, I could've managed. He really is a good boy, I know that. I just... I couldn't deal with it anymore."

"Deal with what?" Tsukauchi asks calmly, watching the woman with sharp eyes.

"People think Quirklessness is the worst thing to have to deal with," Midoriya-San shakes her head, "it's not. Raising Izuku... raising him I... Quirklessness *wasn't* the problem. It wasn't even close to the problem. My resentment towards my child started *before* he was diagnosed, before he split my husband and I up. The Quirklessness was just the means to the end."

Shota glances sideways at Tsukauchi, finding the other man shooting him an identical look of confusion.

The woman lets out a self-deprecating laugh before either of them can say anything. She narrows her eyes at Shota, sharp with a studying glint, "you... you're Izuku's homeroom teacher, aren't you?"

Shota pretends he's not surprised by being identified, nodding his head slowly.

"I saw you on the news, after the boys got kidnapped. Aizawa Shota. I knew you looked familiar, and I did fill out all that Yuuei admission paperwork before I left so I knew your name. You... you've been in close contact with Izuku, haven't you? You must've noticed."

"Noticed?" Shota asks easily, leaning forwards. "Noticed what?"

“He’s *different*,” she repeats. “Always so different. Since he was just a baby. He’s… God, he’s *weird*. I couldn’t… I couldn’t handle it anymore, Aizawa-San, I *couldn’t*. The things he does— the things he said. He’s *not* well.”

Shota’s heart pounds in his chest, but he keeps his expression neutral, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you do,” she shakes her head after studying his face, “the muttering to himself— like he’s talking to someone else. The way he looks at things that aren’t *there*. He’s always done it—since he was just a baby, Aizawa-San. He’s *delusional*,” the woman whispers the word, wiping at watery eyes. “He’s sick.”

“He’s not sick,” Shota blinks, the need to come to Izuku’s defense almost taking over. “There’s nothing wrong with muttering, nor is there anything wrong with his trouble focusing. Midoriya is a normal boy.”

“No, Aizawa-San, he isn’t,” the woman shakes her head.

Shota opens his mouth the defend the boy, but the woman beats him to it.

“He’s always been *odd*. I’ve taken him to so many doctors, Aizawa-San. Medical doctors, therapists. He hides it now—he's learned to. But he’s always been unwell. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was just two, but the medications did *nothing* but make him sick and the diagnosis was revoked by the time he hit three. From there we saw dozens of child psychiatrists and psychologists. They kept telling me it was imaginary friends, when no medical diagnosis was found. He was just a boy creating friends for himself, and I was assured he’d outgrow it.

“He *didn’t*, instead he learned how to *hide* it. I was scared of him. Of what he saw— it wasn’t *normal*. Do you have any idea how it feels when your toddler tells you someone’s watching? When you *feel* someone’s gaze on you when you’re completely alone? I started feeling like *I* was delusional because of him. He put me on edge to the point I could hardly stand being in the same room as him—”

She draws in a stuttery breath, “he *scares* me, and has since he was little. I… I love my son, I do, but I can’t deal with him anymore. I can’t accept it any longer. I can’t *pretend* like he’s normal. I can’t pretend that how he *is* doesn’t bother me. He’s made my life hell, and I-I know he never meant to. He’s a sweet, kind child, but that doesn’t change

the fact that it happened. I shouldn't have to live in fear."

Shota sucks in his own shaky breath, trying not to let her words affect him. He clamps down on the festering anxiety, and cocks his attention to Tsukauchi. The detective is studying Midoriya-San.

Shota knows he can't lie and say he's never noticed anything odd about Izuku.

He and Hizashi had had that talk just weeks earlier. Izuku does strange things. There's no denying that— but Shota also knows that nothing about Izuku screams '*scary*'. He'd never said anything weird, or done anything concerning. Shota of all people should know that; the child is in his homeroom, does extra training with him one-on-one, is in Shota's Hero training classes, and he lives under Shota's roof and has been for months.

If anyone has had time to study and pick the teenager apart, it's Shota.

And there's been nothing overly concerning. Not like how Midoriya Inko is making it out to seem.

He also doesn't know this woman, but he's lived with Izuku for months now— had been teaching him for a full semester. Out of the two of them, it's obvious which of them he'll believe, but the woman's words are... *concerning*.

She's bringing light to fears he'd already had. She's addressing points of concern Shota had been keeping an eye on. He doesn't trust her, but she can't be entirely discredited.

This is still the woman who's abandoned a child. Who'd abandoned Shota's newfound foster son. That's an important part of this as well— a mother looking to get off of charges of abandonment and neglect will be trying to shift blame.

*I left him **because** he scared me.*

This could also be an excuse instead of an explanation.

Everything she's saying now will be taken with a grain of salt.

"Why now, Midoriya-San?" Tsukauchi treads carefully. "Izuku was born Quirkless, and if what you're saying is true, he's always been the same. Why leave him now?"

“I thought he’d be safe,” she bows her head. “I… decided to leave when I was signing the admission forms for Yuuei. He was going to a school filled with Pro Heroes, I assumed someone would take care of him there. Yuuei isn’t world renowned for nothing. He… against all odds, he’d gotten into his dream school. He did that without me. He didn’t need me anymore. *I* didn’t want to be around anymore.”

“So, you just left him?” Shota knows he doesn’t keep the malice from his tone.

“He was fifteen years old!” the woman defends herself, eyes watering. “He’s practically an *adult*.”

“He’s still a child,” Shota snarls back, only half aware of the fact that this is being recorded. “Izuku is a *child*. He’s a child whose *mother* walked out on him without a spoken word. I found that boy frozen half to death on the streets because he lost his home and didn’t feel comfortable enough coming to anyone. He isolated himself from his classmates, friends and his teachers—from *help*— because he didn’t think he could trust anyone.”

“It’s different for Quirkless!” the woman hisses back, that timid woman from before gone before his eyes. “Izuku should be happy I provided for him as long as I did! It’s a strain! *He’s* a strain! These last couple months in America have been heavenly. I’ve lived a normal life since leaving him; one where people don’t know I have a Quirkless child.”

Shota is near seconds away from launching up from his seat and throttling the woman.

He’s expected to sit here and take this? To not defend Izuku?

“Ma’am,” Tsukauchi’s voice has taken a darker turn, and Shota knows the detective is onto him as Tsukauchi’s heel grinds down on Shota’s foot, keeping him anchored. “Your son *has* a Quirk. You can’t fall back on Quirkless laws, and the fact that you’re *trying* to is heinous. Your son has a Quirk, and therefore, you will be charged accordingly.”

“He was Quirkless when I left.”

“No.” Shota snaps with narrowed eyes, “no, you just didn’t bother even *talking* to him. He got his Quirk the day of the Entrance exam for Yuuei. That’s before you would’ve received the actual enrollment papers you signed.”

The woman startles as the information sinks in before she slumps back in her chair. Her hands settle on her thighs and she rubs her palms along the fabric of her jean—another very familiar nervous tic.

“I don’t know what you want me to say here,” Midoriya-San shakes her head, hands curling into fists. “I hadn’t even talked to Izuku in months. I didn’t see him for weeks before I signed those papers. I avoided my own home because I knew he’d be there. I was *done*, Aizawa-San. I didn’t see any point of continuing our relationship. I still don’t.”

“There are better ways to surrender a child,” Tsukauchi tells her sharply. “*Safer* ways. You abandoned your son, and didn’t care what would happen to him. You could’ve surrendered him to the police, or the fire department, or even Yuuei— relinquished your own rights to him. He would’ve been cared for, but you just left. What you did was illegal, Midoriya-San.”

“Not only that,” Shota sucks in through his teeth, irritation ticking upwards, “you shattered that boy’s ability to trust. You took away the only *constant* in his life. You might not have considered yourself an active part of his life, but *he* did. He loves you anyways. He *trusted* you. Izuku’s abandonment issues are not just emotional but physical now. You broke him.”

“It was best for both of us,” the woman whispers and a half-glance at Tsukauchi’s scowling face reveals she honestly believes it. “I don’t want any responsibility for him. I want the best for him, but I don’t want *any* part of it.”

Tsukauchi sucks in a breath, but nods slowly. “You want to sign away all rights to your son?”

“Yes.” Midoriya-San nods without hesitation. “I’m *done*. I want to be free of him. I tried running, but I should’ve gone the legal route instead. I don’t want any legal ties to my son, detective. I just want a normal life.”

Shota swallows down the hurt he feels for Izuku.

He thinks back to the boy insisting he didn’t want to get his mother in trouble back when they’d first approached Tsukauchi with the situation. It makes him sick— Izuku just cares so much, and this woman, his mother, doesn’t.

“Alright,” Tsukauchi cards his fingers through his hair, standing

slowly. He gestures Shota up as well, and the underground Hero pushes himself up, cradling his cold coffee in his hands. He no longer feels like he can stomach anything. “I’ll make arrangements for a lawyer. We’ll discuss this more with when your lawyer arrives.”

The woman bows her head in a nod, not looking at either of them.

Shota follows the detective to the door numbly.

“Aizawa-San?” Shota pauses, but doesn’t look back. Midoriya-San's voice comes out low, hardly there. “You care for my son. I can see it in your eyes... how you talked about him. Defended him. You probably care more than I ever could. Izuku is a good boy, so please keep caring like that. Please... please take care of him.”

Shota forces down another swallow and tries to ignore his racing heart. He doesn’t respond— doesn't dare give this woman any chance to clear her conscious after abandoning her child like she had, but deep down he knows he and Hizashi will stop at nothing to give Izuku what she never did.

The door closes behind them with an echoing click, and the two settle at the two-way mirror just as they had when Shota had arrived. They stand for a moment, in companionable silence, both just watching the woman with the ducked head in the room.

“How’re you holding up, Aizawa?”

Shota scoffs, reaching up to rake his fingers through his hair, “do you even need to ask? I’m *heartbroken* for that kid. I’m beyond pissed off. That woman gave *me* emotional whiplash and I was only in the room with her for twenty minutes, imagine what she could’ve done over fifteen years.”

Tsukauchi gives a sad, responding hum.

“It was a lot,” the detective sighs. “Do you think Midoriya will want to see her?”

Shota gives a shrug. He honestly has no idea. The boy could want answers from her, or he could just want closure. It’s hard to tell. “I don’t know if I’d want to even let him see her. He’s in a pretty good spot right now, and I don’t know what seeing her might do to him. And I doubt she’d want to see him anyways.”

“That’s probably true,” Tsukauchi shakes his head, rubbing at his eyes

with his thumb and middle finger. “I just find it hard to imagine that woman raising Midoriya.”

Shota squeezes his eyes shut, but doesn’t respond. Izuku is a spitting image of his mother, but Shota agrees wholeheartedly. How could that woman produce a kid as good as Izuku. With how she talks about him like he’s some *psychopath*, and the obvious dislike for the boy.

“How much of what she said in there was true?”

Tsukauchi hesitates for half a second before blowing out a breath, “essentially... all of it. She truly believes everything she said. But you know how my Quirk works, I can only pick up that she *believes* what she’s saying is the truth, not that it’s the solid truth. I don’t know if you’d want to look into Midoriya’s medical records— truthfully, I don’t even know what would’ve even been kept considering his Quirk status back then. But it’s something we can look into if you wanted.”

Shota wrinkles his nose as he heaves a heavy sigh. God, what a mess.

“For the record, Aizawa,” Shota glances over at his colleague, “I know I’ve only met Midoriya a handful of times, but he’s a well-rounded kid. I don’t know what she was talking about in there, but... don’t cross what she claimed with what you *know*. She kept saying Midoriya was unwell, but she very well could be the unwell one.”

Shota nods slowly.

He can’t jump to any conclusions.

And he certainly can’t jump to anything without consulting Hizashi first.

It’s already bad enough he didn’t tell his husband what was going on the second he knew. If he knows Hizashi, then he knows the text he’d sent to the blonde’s phone before leaving the apartment that morning won’t sate his husband for long; as is, he just knows his phone will already have questioning texts when he finally turns off ‘do not disturb’.

Shota bites his lip when he thinks of relaying this to Hizashi.

“I have to tell Hizashi about this,” Shota huffs, rocking on his heels in thought, “do you think I could grab a copy of the recording? It’ll make this a lot easier.”

“That’s confidential police evidence, Aizawa. I can’t just hand it out. You know that.”

“What, don’t trust me? We work together; I’ve handled more sensitive cases then this, Tsukauchi.”

The detective's face puckers like Shota had forced a wedge of lemon into his mouth before the man narrows his eyes so they’re glaring thoughtfully at each other.

“You know I can’t just—” Tsukauchi winces, “you know what? I can... give *you* the recording to review. *Alone*. Without your husband, but I’ll have to ask you keep it confidential. Don’t share with Mic. Just for *your* reviewal, since you’ve been involved in this case.”

A small smile quirks onto Shota’s lips as Tsukauchi’s exasperated expression wrinkles into a knowing, disappointed look. Shota can read between the lines— permission to take the recording home where no one will have any idea who sees or hears it. What Tsukauchi doesn’t know (*for certain*), can’t hurt him.

“Of cou—”

“No, stop. Say nothing, Aizawa,” Tsukauchi groans, crossing his arms over his chest, “if I don’t hear your words, I can’t hear you *lying* through your teeth. Sansa will make you a copy of the audio recording, now get out of here before I change my mind.”

“Right,” Shota blows out an almost amused breath. “Thanks.”

“I did nothing for you,” the other grits out, eye twitching in annoyance. “Now unless you want to stick around and help with a mountain of paperwork, phone calls and meetings I’ll have lined up in a matter of *minutes*, shoo. Get back to that husband and kid of yours. And for heaven’s sake, give the damn kid a hug.”

With that, Tsukauchi turns on his heels and disappears into the bullpen where he can slip away into his office. Shota doesn’t envy the detective one bit.

The morning is fairly uneventful after Todoroki leaves their study session. Todoroki arrives exactly at the time they’d agreed, and Izuku is glad he’d opted to sleep in his dorm because he sleeps in. He barely manages to card his fingers through his hair enough times to make it look like he hadn’t just rolled out of bed.

Izuku won't say he's ready for the approaching Pre-Quirk history test, but he won't say he's doomed for failure. At least he's not the only one unprepared for the test; he and Todoroki appear to be in the same boat, as much as that really sucks. He wants his peers to do well.

The Pre-Quirk unit in their history class is hitting the whole class hard though. Maybe they can arrange a class study group before the test? That way everyone can get some extra help from their peers before they're on their own.

They'd studied all morning. By the time Todoroki left, it was nearing lunchtime.

Izuku had offered for the two of them to grab lunch together after studying so hard, but didn't mind Todoroki declining for the sake of calling his sister.

Izuku walked with Todoroki to his room next door before continuing downstairs. None of his classmates seemed to be around, but he knows a lot of them had gone home last night to spend the day off with their families.

It's no surprise that Izuku had found Kacchan in the kitchen, stirring a pot of spicy curry for lunch.

He glares in the direction of the doorway where Izuku pauses in surprise, eyeing his childhood friend suspiciously. The blonde glares back before averting his gaze back to the pot. The rice cooker chimes in the corner of the room, drawing Kacchan away from the pot.

It's a familiar scent.

Homey.

Kacchan always used to make curry whenever they were at the Bakugou house. It's Auntie's specialty, so it obvious why it's something Kacchan mastered. He'd always loved curry night when he was little, so now it's always his fallback meal.

Izuku intends to turn on his heels and leave Kacchan to himself— he's not sure what his childhood friend is thinking, or how he'd taken the punishment from Shota. Maybe he's mad at Izuku still?

"You're allowed to sit, Nerd," Kacchan grumbles without looking up. "I won't punch you again. Sensei would probably beat my ass if I did."

Izuku pretends he doesn't startle at being addressed, but he does move swiftly to the table to wait his turn. He doesn't want to get in Kacchan's way, and it looks like he's almost done, so Izuku doesn't mind waiting for a bit.

A bowl of rice and curry is slid in front of Izuku and he blinks in surprise as Kacchan turns on his heels and stalks back to the rice cooker, empty second bowl in hand.

"Um..."

"An apology," Kacchan snarls, looking away sharply. He turns his attention back to the rice cooker, spooning out a second helping. "For last night. I didn't know you... felt like I did. About— y'know. I probably should've guessed a nerd like you *would*, even if it was more my fault then yours. Anyways, I threw the first punch, but we both got in trouble. You didn't even want to fight so... whatever. Just eat your fuckin' curry before I take it back, Deku."

"O-oh," Izuku bites back a smile, "thank you, Kacchan."

"Whatever," Kacchan snaps, piling curry onto his own bowl of rice. He gives Izuku one last sour look before leaving the kitchen.

Izuku doesn't know if he's upset Kacchan didn't want to eat with him, or relieved. They aren't there yet, he decides. They're barely friends again— more acquaintances that only *sometimes* fight like rabid dogs.

"That kid is *foul*," Izuku glances to the side where Oboro is glaring at where Kacchan had just disappeared. He hadn't noticed the ghost following him. "I still don't understand why you're even trying with him. He's just an asshole."

"Your dislike is showing again," Izuku mutters drily, standing up and grabbing the bowl of curry to eat in his room. They're allowed to eat upstairs only if all the dishes are returned by the end of the day. Shota had made it clear that they'd lose the privileged if the dishes started depleting. There hadn't been a problem with it yet thus far.

"My dislike is *always* showing when Bakugou's involved." The ghost drawls with a shake of his head. He trails after Izuku with his arms crossed over his chest, "curry doesn't make up for getting someone house arrest for fighting after hours. And that was a sorry excuse of an apology— he didn't even say sorry like a normal human being."

"It was actually a really good apology by all Kacchan standards,"

Izuku shrugs as he treks up the stairs, “and it’s really *good* curry.”

“Now you’re just trying to make me jealous,” Oboro pouts as Izuku opens his dorm room door with a snort of a laughter. “Everything he makes smells so good, I hate it. How can a guy like Bakugou make something that smells so heavenly?”

“His mom’s a good cook too,” Izuku tells the ghost as he settles at his desk, organizing his assignments and stacking them in a neat pile so he doesn’t ruin anything. “He learned from her. Auntie makes things so spicy though—I swear, sometimes it felt like I was going to breathe fire when I ate at their house.”

“No kidding,” Oboro cocks an eyebrow from the bed. Izuku spots the newest library book he’d been suckered into checking out on his bedspread, knowing it hadn’t been there when Todoroki was in the room. He doesn’t comment on it. “I like spicy stuff, but my tolerance is awful. It tastes so good, but makes me cry like a baby.”

Izuku smiles at the thought as he takes a bite of the curry. It’s a perfect amount of spice, actually pretty tame for something Kacchan made. Maybe he’s finally toning it down for their classmates.

The first night Kacchan had cooked, no one but Izuku and Kacchan himself had been able to eat the spicy curry. They’d gone through a week's worth of milk in one night.

It was pretty funny, seeing his classmates fighting over milk to cool off their mouths and gulping down water uselessly. Oboro had cackled all evening long until he was crying. Izuku found it sorta funny, but he also felt back for everyone. Kacchan was just annoyed.

Izuku and Kacchan had had a lot of curry to eat over the next couple days, while the class (when their mouths were no longer on fire) ate instant ramen.

That was when the rule ‘Bakugou isn’t allowed to cook alone’ came to be. Kacchan absolutely loathes that rule. Izuku just feels bad for whichever classmate is assigned cooking duty with him.

Izuku smiles around another spoonful of rice at the thought.

He watches out of the corner of his eye as Oboro grabs a book from the stack of new library books he’d been guilted into borrowing. The ghost is letting the conversation drop, which is always a good thing. Oboro has a tendency to hold a grudge—especially against Kacchan.

With the ghost distracted, Izuku finishes up his lunch before working on his math homework. He finishes that up as well before trying to work on his English. He's stumped on that though.

"Do you think Hizashi would mind me coming up to ask about English?"

Oboro doesn't look up from his book, lying on his stomach on Izuku's bed as he read, "I think Hizashi will take whatever opportunity he can to talk about English."

A pause, as the ghost finally glances up with a cocked eyebrow, "and you live up there too. They won't care. You have a key to the apartment, and you have a bedroom up there too. You're welcome."

"I just don't want to bother them," Izuku shrugs, stacking his assignments together. "Are they even home? I haven't seen Hizashi or Shota today. Shota usually comes down to check on us, but he hasn't."

"Sho was gone when I went upstairs earlier," Oboro finally pushes himself up, sitting cross-legged, "probably got called in on some Hero work or something. But Hizashi's up there. He was working on marking, last I checked."

He takes the ghost's word for it, grabbing and holding his papers to his chest as he leaves his room and treks up the stairs. The apartment is pretty quiet.

"If you knock on this door, I will shove you aside and use all my strength to open the door myself. I told you; you live here too. You don't knock on your *own* door."

Izuku deflates, letting his fist drop to his side. He hesitates a second longer before turning the knob and pushing the door open. He slips off his slippers and toes them so they're pressed against the wall before stepping into the apartment.

"It was best for both of us." Izuku freezes, papers almost dropping from his suddenly slack arms. Is that... *"I don't want any responsibility for him. I want the best for him, but I don't want any part of it."*

There's a sharp inhale, masculine and unfamiliar to Izuku's ears until there's actual words, *"you want to sign away all rights to your son?"*

Tsukauchi. That was detective Tsukauchi's voice.

“Yes.” Izuku’s mother’s tone is sharp, but soft. A sick feeling settles in his stomach. *“I’m done. I want to be free of him. I tried running, but I should’ve gone the legal route instead. I don’t want any legal ties to my son, detective. I just want a normal life.”*

Mom…?

Izuku steps into the room, seeing his guardians sat on the couch, both glaring down at a Shota’s open laptop where the audio file is running. He must make a sound or something, because both men are suddenly whipping to look in his direction, startled.

Izuku just blinks at them swallowing roughly. “I should’ve knocked.”

“No!” Hizashi is the first one up, rounding the couch, “you shouldn’t have, Sunshine. You were right to just come in. You’re free to just come and go as you please, and you always will be, no matter where we live, ya’dig? You’re fine. You’re always welcome up here, ‘member?”

“We’re the ones who should’ve been more cautious,” Shota adds as he closes his laptop. “Sorry, Kid, I thought you’d still be with your friends.”

Izuku gives a slow nod of understanding, “that was… that was my mom’s voice.”

Shota’s mouth pressed into a guilty line as he returns a slow nod, “yes, it was.”

“You found her?” He asks even though he already knows the answer. Of course they found her if they have a voice recording. And Tsukauchi’s in that recording too. “Is she… okay?”

“She’s fine, sweetheart,” Hizashi throws a hand across Izuku’s shoulders, “she’s safe and sound but… she’s in Tsukauchi’s hands now. She’s being charged with child neglect and abandonment, so she’ll be stuck around here for a while.”

Shota studies Izuku before patting the couch beside him. Izuku moves numbly along with Hizashi to settle on the couch, “how do you feel about all of this? About your… mother being found?”

Izuku shrugs, fiddling with his papers, “I don’t know how to feel. I’ve… she’s my mom, y’know? I m-missed her. But she… she left and what she just said on that recording—”

“You weren’t supposed to hear that,” Shota tells him softly. “I’m sorry, Problem Child, this isn’t how I wanted to tell you about this. I’ve only known about her arrival since this morning when Tsukauchi called to bring me in. We’d planned on telling you this evening…”

“So you… you met her then?”

“I did,” Shota grimaces, “Tsukauchi asked me to be a part of the interrogation. She… admitted to abandoning you, and to long-term negligence. She’ll be getting punished for what she did to you, Izuku.”

The boy gives a nod. He wants to know what else was said. His mother has always been wary of him—had she said something? Something about… about what he *does*? Neither Shota or Hizashi look hesitant to be around him, and he doesn’t see that pitying look that everyone always shoots him with when his mother tells them about him.

“I thought my mom was in America?”

“She was,” Hizashi answers that one. “With your dad.”

“In Los Angeles of all places,” Shota huffs.

Izuku laughs softly at the underground Hero. “I thought she might be when Auntie mentioned my dad— that's where she always used to tell me dad lived. I just… never thought she’d want to live there and… and I never thought she’d go without me.”

I’m done. I want to be free of him.

Izuku digs his thumb into his thigh. “I guess I was wrong.”

He doesn’t need to look up to know his guardians are sharing a look.

“Look, Sunshine,” Hizashi places his hand on Izuku’s knee, giving a light squeeze, “we don’t know what you’re going through, and we can’t even pretend to. It won’t do us any good. But we know this is hard for you. We just want you to know we’ll stand by you no matter what, yeah?”

“What… do you mean?”

Shota clears his throat, “we were just wondering if you wanted to see your mother or not. There’s not obligation to and… well, even if you did want to see her, it’s something she’d need to agree to. She… ah,

well—”

“She’s disowning me,” Izuku doesn’t need it to be explained. He’d heard just a snippet of what was probably a long conversation, and he could piece it together. It’s pretty obvious that’s what’s happening.

Hizashi winces like Izuku had yelled the words, as Shota sinks back into the couch, head bowing in a nod.

“I don’t have to see her though?”

“Do you not want to?” Hizashi asks quietly, “we won’t force you. It’s completely your decision. We’ll just be right by your side, Kiddo.”

“I don’t know,” Izuku shrugs, “I... I don’t know.”

“That’s alright,” Shota assures softly. “You don’t have to have all the answers right now, Problem Child. You can take as much time as you need to make a decision. There is no right or wrong answer, just what feels right to you, alright?”

“Okay,” Izuku bows his head. “I... I um, I’ll think about it. I should probably get back downstairs—”

“Ah, ah, ah,” Hizashi frowns, “I’d actually like for you to spend the night up here with us, if you don’t mind that. You don’t have to, of course, but I’d planned on asking you to stay up here when we told you anyways. Just for my own peace of mind, ya’dig?”

“Um, okay,” Izuku agrees. He really doesn’t care which bed he sleeps in anyways. They’re the exact same beds, just on different floors. And one room feels a lot more isolated then the other.

“So, what did you come up here for anyways?” Hizashi cocks an eyebrow, “did you just miss your two favorite guardian-teachers and wanted to come say hi?”

“Oh!” Izuku perks up at the reminder, “right, I was wondering if you could help me with the homework you assigned. I’m... I just don’t understand it very well.”

Izuku sits stiffly in the police interrogation room. His eyes flicker around the room before settling on the woman across from him. She hasn’t changed in the months he hasn’t seen her— looks exactly the way she had the last time they'd spoken.

It's surreal to be looking at his mother. Surreal being in the same room after so long.

Anxiety pulses in his chest.

He doesn't know what to say; what to do.

"How have you been, son?"

Izuku looks up at his mother after the prompting question. He opens his mouth to answer, but ends up biting down on his lip instead. Pain blooms across his lip, and the metallic taste of blood coats his tongue.

A part of him is angry. She leaves without a word and then has the nerve to ask that? But the other part of him is scrambling to hold onto the fact she cares enough to even ask.

"I... would've been better if you were here."

His mother doesn't respond. Doesn't even look at him.

Izuku heaves a breath and tries to shove down the hurt.

"I missed you," Izuku admits, "I don't... understand why you left me."

"I left because of you."

Izuku snaps his attention up, mouth agape as he stares into his mother's expressionless face. Had he... heard that right?

"W-what?"

"Because of you," she repeats easily. "I left Japan so I wouldn't have to see you anymore. It was only a matter of time. You know what you're like, Izuku, you knew I was bound to go at some point."

"I-I don't... I don't understand, mom."

"What's there to not understand?" His mother cocks an eyebrow, shooting Izuku an unimpressed look. "I've raised you since you were a little boy, we both know why I left. Why would I want to stay around a freak?"

The word has Izuku sucking in a surprised breath. He's been called it before— many times— but never by his mother. She'd never... called him anything bad.

“M-mom?”

“Why do you look so surprised?” Inko asks with a wrinkled nose, “you know exactly what you are, Izuku. You know exactly why I left. There’s no reason for you to look at me like that. I’m not the one who ruined our relationship.”

Izuku blinks owlishly, shifting in his seat. He doesn’t know how to respond to that. What are you supposed to say to that?

He draws in a shaky breath, “I didn’t ruin anything, you’re the one who—”

“I left to get away from you,” his mother narrows her eyes. “You’ve ruined every relationship you’ve ever been a part of, Izuku. Your relationship with your father, your relationship with me. With Katsuki-kun. All the children at your school, and the teachers forced to teach you.”

Izuku flattens his hands on his thighs, digging his nails into the fabric of his pants. “I didn’t...”

“And don’t even get me started on what’s going to happen with those guardians of yours,” Inko tuts, “your track record with teachers is terrible, it’s only a matter of time before you wreck that too.”

“I won’t wreck anything,” Izuku breathes out, eyes hardening. “I trust my teachers.”

“You believe that?” His mother’s head cocks to the side, an unpleasant smile crooking onto her lips, “you trust them, huh? Then why haven’t you told them yet?”

Izuku frowns, shifting even further away from the woman across from him. He glances around the room for an escape, done with this conversation, but... where’s the door?

“You’re putting all this trust into them, but you don’t trust them with your secret,” his mother leans back in her chair. “If you trusted them, you would’ve told them.”

“I trust them,” Izuku huffs out. “I just don’t want to tell them. They don’t need to know.”

“Because you know that they’ll never accept you,” his mother shakes her head in that way she always did when Izuku was a child. That

condescending way. “They don’t love you, Izuku; no one does. Who could possibly love you? You’re a *psychopath*. Seeing ghosts? Do you seriously think anyone will believe you? You’re *crazy*, Izuku.”

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but no words come out. His heart pounds in his chest, but he can’t seem to move. Can’t push himself up, or flee, or even just suck in a breath of oxygen past the sinking dread filling his chest.

“You’re always in a world of you own,” His mother tuts harshly, head shaking as she leans forwards. It’s like a switched has been flipped. “Do you honestly think they’d ever want *you*? Those teachers of yours? They don’t want you, Izuku, they’re *stuck* with you. Like I was. You think you belong with them— at Yuuei High School, with Pro Heroes as you guardians. You think they’re going to want to keep you around, but they won’t. We both know they won’t. You need to face the hard reality: no one wants someone like you.”

“T-that’s not true—”

“I didn’t, did I?” his mother shrugs coldly, expression hard and uncaring. “I escaped you as soon as I could, and it was the best decision I’ve ever made. You’re a rock tied to a balloon, Izuku. You drag people down. How long do you think they’ll keep you when they figure you out? You’re not normal. They’ll see right through you eventually. They’ll leave when they know— when they see what makes you *deranged*.”

“N-no, they—”

“*They won’t?*” His mother laughs humorlessly, voice mimicking Izuku’s own. The boy snaps his jaw shut and recoils back. Was she... mocking him? “What?” his mother coos, “you don’t think they actually *love* you, do you?”

Izuku swallows, palming at his eyes. He’s not surprised to find them so wet—his cheeks are lined with tears and his vision of his mother is blurring. Izuku glances quickly to the mirror on the side of the room, wondering desperately where Shota and Hizashi are. Why aren’t they stopping her? Why aren’t they helping? Where’s Oboro?

“Awh, my poor pathetic Izuku,” she plants her hands on the tabletop, standing and leaning forwards so she’s closer to him; face to face with him. Her smile is anything but pleasant, “poor little Izuku looking for love anywhere he can. Mommy and Daddy didn’t love you so you suckered someone else into it?”

“N-No, p-please, I-I—” Izuku scrubs at his cheeks, leaning back to put distance between him and his mother. “I-I wouldn’t—”

“It’s pitiful, Izuku. No one loves you. Get that through your head. No one wants a child like you. I don’t. I *never* did. I know you’ve wondered why I left you now, but the truth is, I *should’ve* left right alongside your father. Rid myself of you before I got stuck with you. He knew what he was doing leaving. He figured you out long before I did. You’re like a virus: you *spread* and make those around you *suffer*.”

“M-mom, please stop—” Izuku wheezes— why can’t he *breathe?*— “I-I-I'm s-so-sorry!”

“Sorry doesn’t make up for the years I spent weighed down by you. The years I slaved away at work so a useless, nutcase like you could try to leave a normal life,” the woman snaps, leaning even closer to him. “I got stuck with you. You made my life hell, and now you’re trying to do the same thing to someone else. To your teachers who so kindly took you in.”

Izuku’s hands lift to his curls, grabbing fistfuls and pulling. He bends forwards, sobbing as his forehead hits the edge of the table. He can’t bear to look at her anymore, but he can’t force himself up to leave. His body feels heavy, and his feet feel like anvils. It’s like he’s *rooted* in the chair.

“But they don’t *know* you, do they, sweetheart?” His mother’s tone curls into something drastically different; now sickly sweet. “They don’t know what you are, or what you’ll do to them. You’ll do exactly what you did to me, won’t you? It’s in your nature— it's what you *are*. A *freak*.”

Izuku shakes— he's sobbing as tremors rattle through his body. He can’t think straight, and he can’t even manage to clamp down the near vibrating panic his body hides behind. She’s being so, so cruel, but she’s *right*.

“What will you do when they figure you out?” She asks kindly, the soft coo sounding *wrong*. “What will you do when they realize you’re psychotic? Seeing and speaking to things not there? *Befriending* their dead school friend? You’re disturbed— nothing about you is normal. What will happen to little Izuku when his secret is out?”

Izuku freezes, lifting his head and curling into himself, “h-how do you —”

"*What?*" Izuku whips around to the door where Shota and Hizashi are standing.

“Uh oh,” his mother murmurs just to him, "the cat’s out of the bag. Now what, Izuku? How, oh how, will you talk yourself outta this one, hm? For years you’ve hidden yourself, what will you do when it all crumbles around you? Do your guardians really like you as much as you seem to think?”

He ignores his mother for the sake of cowering away from his guardians. They’re suddenly there—he doesn’t even see the interrogation room door anywhere. Where had they come from?

It’s the look on Hizashi’s face that shatters Izuku’s heart. The devastation and heartbreak. Izuku’s seconds away from groveling at the man’s feet when he finally speaks, low and broken, “why?”

“’z-zashi,” Izuku whines tearfully, “’m sorry, ‘m so sorry. I didn’t want you to—”

“You didn’t wany us to know you’re a *freak?*” Shota spits, venom lacing his voice. It stings more that Shota’s the one saying it. Calling him something like that— like the kids back at school used to.

Izuku curls even tighter in on himself, trying to suck in air. Everything is happening at once, and where did they even come from? “I-I’m not, p-please, ‘m so sorry. I didn’t mean to lie; you-you weren’t supposed to know! I’m sorry!”

“So you never planned on telling us?” the man continues, stalking closer with his eyes narrowed angrily. “Shirakumo Oboro is *our* friend. He’s not yours. You have no right, Midoriya. You have no right pretending to know him. Using him to get closer to us.”

“He’s my friend,” Izuku pleads, wishing that the ghost would appear and provide him some comfort. Like he always does. “I’m sorry. He-he's my *best friend*. I wouldn’t ever— please, you-you've gotten believe me! Oboro is—”

“He’s dead,” Shota snaps. “You really are insane, aren’t you? A couple screws loose in that head of yours, Midoriya? Everyone was *right* about you. I was right about you on that first day. You’ll never make it as a Hero if you can’t distinguish between *imaginary* and *real*. You’ll be a liability.”

“I’m not,” Izuku winces, bowing his head. He can hardly form any

words, and what he can manage tastes bitter. “I’m so sorry, I-I didn’t mean to keep it a secret! I just wanted to be normal! I know the d-difference!”

Despite Shota’s insistence that Izuku’s making it up— is actually insane— Hizashi seems to actually believe him. And it’s almost worse. His eyes are watery, and his voice wobbles. Hizashi looks like he’s about to break into tears, and Izuku’s stomach *lurches*.

“You could see him all this time and you didn’t tell us?” Hizashi sounds so heartbroken, eyes downcast like he can’t bear to look at Izuku, “after we told you about him? Showed you him? We shared him with you and you... you *kept* him from us? How could you?”

“I... I-I'm sorr—”

“Enough!” Shota snaps, eyes flickering red, “nothing you say will change what you did. You’re nothing but trouble, Midoriya. I should’ve known better then to get involved with you any more than I had to.”

“Izuku,” Hizashi whispers, wiping at his own tears as anger settles in his eyes, “you’ve been *lying* to us this entire time? We took you in, and cared for you and you repay us by keeping things from us? Keeping our friend from us? You’ve been using our friend to get closer to us. You’re *disgusting*, Midoriya.”

“I didn’t mean to!” Izuku pleads, full on uncontrollably sobbing.

He digs the heels of his palms into his eyes, shame and guilt washing over him.

They weren’t supposed to find out. No one was supposed to find out.

“Yes, you did,” his mother coos sweetly. Izuku’s attention snaps towards her again, pushing back so hard that he sends his chair toppling over at the dark smile on her lips. She inches closer and close, words a haunting sing-song, “you ruin things for yourself, baby. You always have. You ruin things for yourself just as well as you do for other people— split your father and I up, drove him away from us. Drove *me* away too. And now you’ll do the same thing to them.”

Izuku blinks watery eyes as she throws a thumb over her shoulder, gesturing to his guardians. Shota looks mad, while Hizashi looks heartbroken. Another sob bubbles up. This isn’t what he wants, this was never supposed to be found out.

He's hurt them.

He's hurt them, and it's *his* fault.

This is a *nightmare*.

Izuku wakes with a gasp, body soaked in a cold sweat. He heaves a couple breathes, reaching up to card his fingers through his hair for no reason other than the attempt to calm himself down.

It *was* a nightmare.

"Woah," a soft voice shushes with urgency, "hey, hey, you're okay. You gotta breathe, 'zuku. Deep in, deep out. Holy shit. You are okay, right? You were thrashing around, and mumbling and—"

"I'm okay," Izuku manages out under his breath because even in his state, he can't handle someone being worried about him. He mutters the words easily; despite the fact he'd never felt *less* okay in his life. "It was a bad dream, I... I'm fine. It was... it was a *dream*."

A nightmare, really.

"You really don't look alright," Oboro gnaws on his bottom lip, hands hovering like Izuku will flop out of his bed and onto the floor. "What the hell were you dreaming about? Shigaraki?"

"I wish," Izuku breathes out, "that would've been easier to stomach. Just... I need a minute."

Oboro squints, "are you *sure* you're okay?"

"Yeah," Izuku whispers through a scratchy throat, drawing in a shaky breath, "it's... it was nothing. Just a bad dream. I'm... I'm okay. Don't worry about me. I'm fine now. It—" he heaves another breath, voice breaking, "—wasn't real."

"I *am* worried about you," the ghost huffs. "I've never seen you react like that. You woke up *terrified*, and it didn't have anything to do with the villain trying to kill you. What the hell, man? I called your name like ten times, and I would've shaken you but I didn't wanna scare you. Or freeze you."

Izuku lets a startled exhale out as he rakes his fingers through his sweat dampened curls.

"Sorry," he laughs humorlessly. "Didn't mean to worry you."

It still doesn't feel like he can draw in a decent breath. He's shivering, and it's not because he's cold—in fact he's too hot. He kicks the covers off and moves to stand. Lying in bed, being alone in his room suddenly feels like too much.

"I can't be in here right now," he tells Oboro, already striding towards the bedroom door. He knows the ghost is on his heels as he eases out of the room, but Oboro doesn't say anything.

He can't sit still, and certainly doesn't want to try going back to sleep. He's jittery, and hot and in desperate need of some water. His throat burns, and feels scratchy like he'd been screaming. He knows he hadn't been, but it still feels wrong. He doesn't want to be alone in his room, even if he knows, technically, he's not alone with Oboro around.

He slips out the door and tries not to feel threatened by the silence of the apartment. The lights are all off. He knows the Heights Alliance apartment well enough to be able to maneuver through the dark. He doesn't bother turning the kitchen light on, not wanting to disturb his guardians.

He beelines for the cupboard he knows houses glasses and quietly grabs one, moving next to the sink where he fills the glass and chugs the water. It doesn't help much. A wave of... *something* washes over him, and it feels like all his energy is sapped out of him.

He sets the glass down by the sink and slides to sit on the floor, burying his face in his knees.

"Izuku," the teen feels the ghost at his side, "what... what's wrong?"

He doesn't know why he's crying. He sniffles into the fabric of his pajama pants and buries his nose even deeper in the gap between his knees. He hugs tight at his knees, squeezing them tightly to his chest.

His eyes are squeezed shut, but he still sees when the overhead light flicks on.

"Izuku?" Shota's voice is quiet from the doorway, and he doesn't dare look up. Isn't sure he can see his guardian's face right now. He presses his face harder against his legs, muffling a stuttered breath.

He waits for his guardian to say something else; to tell him to get up off the floor, or to ask what's wrong. He's waiting for something, but he's not expecting Shota to just settle on the floor on his other side—

the side Oboro isn't already taking up.

His guardian doesn't say anything, just shifts until he's sitting similarly to Izuku, yet a little more relaxed.

They just sit for a while.

At some point Shota's hand settles on Izuku's back, rubbing slow, careful lines along his arched spine, and it just makes him sob harder against his knees. He cries for a lot of reasons— fear from his nightmare, the foreign comfort he's being given. The longing for his mother, and the heartbreaking realization that she's gone. She's actually gone. He'd heard her admit to wanting her custody of him taken. She really was done.

He's not sure if he's just working through months' worth of bottled-up emotions all at once, being overly emotional, or even if he's just overtired, but he can't seem to stop it either way.

He's surprised his guardian sits with him in the silence for so long. It's probably the middle of the night and he knows Shota's probably tired. He'd been at the police station all morning with Izuku's mother and the detective. He should be sleeping now, but instead he's sitting on the cold kitchen tiles with Izuku sobbing at his side.

Izuku can only hear the sound of his own crying, and his own heart pounding in his chest.

Slowly but surely his sobs die down to cries, and then to sniffles before he's just sort of choking on his own breath. When he's sure he won't start crying again, he angles his head to look up at Shota.

The man is watching him with a soft look, hand still running along the vertebrae in Izuku's spine, "feeling any better?"

Izuku lets out something halfway between a laugh and a cry, nodding his head slightly, "a bit."

He lets his cheek settle on his knee, taking in his guardian. Shota has one knee drawn up to his own chest, while his other leg is outstretched. The hand not pressing grounding on Izuku's back is draped over his bent knee, back pressed against the cabinets.

"I'm sorry," Izuku offers quietly, "I didn't mean to wake you."

"It was actually Nemo who woke me," Shota admits with a tiny smile,

“I think she heard you out here, and then when I was awake, I heard you too. I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Izuku thinks about telling his guardian that he is, but he doubts he’d be believed. Instead, he just lets himself shift until he’s almost pressed into Shota’s side. He hopes it’s answer enough that he’s *not* feeling okay. “I’m sorry I’m making you sit on the floor.”

“Nothing wrong with the floor,” Shota insists lightly, letting his hand lift from Izuku’s back to hook cautiously over his shoulders instead. “I sleep down here a lot. Not usually in the kitchen— ‘zashi somehow always manages to step on me when I try.”

Izuku snickers under his breath as he enjoys the company.

It’s better than sitting in here alone. Despite the chill of the floor, he feels warm and content.

Nothing else is said for a long moment, Izuku slowly lets his head lower to Shota’s shoulder, testing the waters before actually settling down. The man doesn’t seem to care; just blows out an amused breath and settles back against the cupboards.

Izuku stares unseeing across the room, where Blanket is sitting staring at him— or maybe staring at Oboro who hasn’t moved, but had remained silent at his side. The chill is comforting.

It’s the sound of shuffling that draws his mind back, eyes flicking to Shota first, but the man hasn’t moved.

“Sho...?” Comes sleepily from the doorway. “You okay? You didn’t come back to bed and I got worri—”

Hizashi cuts himself off, taking a second to adjust his glasses as he takes in the scene with sleepy eyes. It’s no longer then a second before the sleepiness is gone from his face and he’s easing closer with a soft exhale of: “oh, sweetheart.”

Tears blur his vision again, but a couple fast blinks rid him of them. He’s done crying tonight.

“You doin’ okay, sunshine?”

“Yeah,” Izuku’s voice sounds watery even to his own years, “I guess it’s just hitting me now that she... she really doesn’t want me, y’know? M-my own mom doesn’t...”

He sniffles, palming at his eyes in an attempt to wipe away the moisture, “I k-know it was coming. She *left* without me. She… she didn’t care what happened to me, but I just hoped that maybe… maybe she’d… b-but… I never thought it would *actually* happen. T-that she’d… that she’d give me up like that. I just—”

And more tears. He roughly dry washes his face in his hands.

“Darling,” Hizashi coos, moving to crouch in front of Izuku. He gently cups the teen’s face in his hands, thumbing away the tears under his eyes, “you’re alright. If your mother chooses to let go of you, there’s something wrong with her. We’ve got you.”

“We’ve got you,” Shota echoes, patting Izuku’s knee. “We’ve always got you.”

“Always,” Oboro adds softly from where he’d swapped places with Hizashi, now stood in the doorway and out of danger of being touched by the two men. “Your mom doesn’t know what she’s missing out on.”

“It’s late,” Hizashi glances at the clock on the oven. Izuku fear that the man will suggest going back to bed and he really, really doesn’t want to do that— “why don’t you’n’Sho go grab some blankets and pick a movie to watch, and I’ll make us all some tea? I don’t think I could fall asleep if I *tried*.”

The man stands to his full height easily, before holding out both hands. Shota takes the first, and after a second of uncertainty, Izuku grabs the other and then Hizashi is pulling them both up.

Izuku ends up falling asleep snuggled under a blanket, sandwiched between his two guardians just twenty minutes after the movie starts. He does not dream of his mother again.

“Y’know,” Hizashi whispers after glancing down and making sure the teenager curled into Shota is good and asleep. The man he’s using as a pillow lulls his own head in Hizashi’s direction, “if I ever meet that woman, I don’t think I could hold myself back.”

Shota snorts a laugh, fingers still trailing through green curls, “and that, babe, is why Tsukauchi called *me* and not *you*. You know the media would run with *‘Present Mic—A murderer?’*. Not good publicity.”

“No,” the blonde agrees with a fond smile, “but it would make me feel a whole lot better about this.”

Chapter End Notes

I was so mean to our poor little green-bean. I'm sorry Izuku, but that mental break was a long time coming. I wanted Inko to be a bad mom, but not an awful mom, and I hope that came through. I love Inko tbh, felt bad making her bad, but it's for the plot! Dadzawa and Dadmic for the win.

I think we're starting to get to the end of this fic! I have yet to decide whether I'm going to do a re-write of the Overhaul Arc, but either way there's still a lot more to do before this thing's finished. I'll raise the question now though of if there's anything you guys want to see before it's finished? Leave a comment and I'll see if I can fit it in somewhere!

That's a wrap for this chapter! Let me know what you thought about it, because I don't know how well it came out? Anyways! As always, comments are greatly appreciated! I love seeing Kudos as well! Thanks so much for reading, and I hope you all enjoyed!

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

Hello! :)

I thought you guys deserved a fluffy chapter after the last one, so I had a lot of fun with this one!

That is all, so enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is a little on edge after that night with his guardians.

Nothing changes—not that he can see, but he still can't help but feel like something's going to happen. That heavy weight in your chest where something is going on, but you don't know what.

He knows Shota had met his mother, and he knows she has always had a tendency to keep his... *oddness* a secret to protect herself from embarrassment. She'd always just brushed his weirdness off with a laugh when someone would point it out, and she never brought it up herself.

She just liked to pretend everything was normal. That he was normal.

Ignorance is bliss.

He'd known that early on when she'd shush him at the park, or grocery store before looking around like Izuku even *mentioning* something she couldn't see, like a woman who'd smiled and waved at him, would instantly make everyone judge them.

No one ever cared. No one even noticed them— he'd never truly understood why she always felt like they were being watched and judged by anyone in the vicinity, when no one cares what a *child* randomly prattles on about.

He even remembers her grabbing his hand when he'd gone to wave back at the woman that day, sporting a wide smile because people aren't particularly *kind* to him. His mother had laughed nervously when she'd noticed him, eyes flicking around despite the empty aisle as she leaned close and hissed a light: '*no waving at the cereal, sweetheart, remember?*'.

The woman in the cereal aisle had frowned, eyeing his mother as Izuku was tugged away by his hand.

He still managed a wave over his shoulder that the woman returned fondly.

He'd always known she thought he was weird. He'd always known she even knew he'd never really gotten better. Even when he didn't talk about ghosts, or anything close, she was wary of him. Separated herself from him.

He'd never understood.

Even when he was *trying* to be normal, she never changed.

Izuku wonders now what she really would've told Shota. Would she mention the ghosts? It had always been a secret, one she kept close to her heart because she wanted to be normal. She wanted them to be normal— the two of them. Single mother and son.

The Bakugou family and his doctors growing up had been the only ones to know about his problems, but they all just thought he was delusional. For a long while growing up, even he'd thought he was delusional, even though he knew they were real. He'd never felt more isolated— from his mother and family friends, as well as the ghosts he'd tried to tell himself didn't exist.

But they *did*. He can't pretend they didn't. He'd tried. It always felt wrong to ignore them— ghosts or not, they were still people, right? He craved human interaction; his Quirklessness hadn't been a problem for desperate ghosts he encountered through day-to-day life.

They treated him like a normal person, and that's more than the living people did after he was diagnosed. Maybe that's why Izuku's never seen a problem with the ghosts; they tended to have more humanity behind them than the living did. He'd even met a couple ghosts from the Pre-Quirk Era, which is *amazing*, if you think about it.

Still, his mother only really told Auntie and Uncle so she'd have someone to talk to about Izuku. He doesn't know if all parents gossip about their kids to their friends—well, he supposes some might brag about their kids, but his mother never really had anything to brag about.

Izuku doesn't know if that came up in the interrogation. He doesn't know what she would've said in the interview, even if it had come up.

What she would've told Shota. He wonders if she would've thrown him under the bus to clear her own name.

She'd never once entertained the idea that he could really see ghosts, no matter how many times he told her exactly what he was seeing, so he's pretty sure she wouldn't have mentioned that part of his *supposed* delusions. She'd always just jumped straight to him being delusional and sick in the head.

His guardians haven't said anything though— haven't acted any differently towards him since that night, but there's still a *chance*. His mother had pretended for fifteen years after all. What's stopping Shota and Hizashi from doing the same? From pretending everything's alright when they're scared of him?

He clears the thought by drawing anxious fingers through his curls.

He tries to focus back down on his homework but knows he won't be making much progress when his head's not in it. Plus, he wouldn't want to hand anything that he didn't give his all on in. His grades suffered greatly when he did that while he'd been working at the café.

Izuku blows out a breath and leans back in his chair. He throws an arm over his eyes and sighs heavily into the material of his sweatshirt sleeve.

"Izukuuu!"

Izuku turns towards the direction of the voice, not bothering to move his arms that's obstructing his view. It's not like he needs to anyways to identify the familiar voice that hadn't been here a second ago, which also didn't need to open the door at all. "Yeah?"

"There's a surprise!" The ghost chirps excitedly.

"Huh?" Izuku finally lets his arm fall, hands flattening along the edge of his desk. "What surprise— hang on, weren't you with Shota? I thought he had a meeting you wanted to stalk?"

"First of all, I *observe*, not *stalk*. You're rude." The ghost scoffs with a pout for one single second before the wide smile is back, "but yes, I was! And, *because* I was there, I know there's a surprise! It's for you mostly, but I think the rest of 1-A'll like it too!"

Izuku blinks at that, "for me, but my class will like it too?"

“Well,” the ghost huffs as he crosses his arms over his chest dramatically, “not technically for you, but I know you’ll like it. Just—shh! Stop asking questions and come with me! To the common area! You’ll like it! C’mon, c’mon! Shota’s on his way back!”

The ghost ushers him up in a strange way that doesn’t touch Izuku at all. Since moving into the dorms, Iuzku had tried hard to enforce a ‘no touching’ rule on school grounds. He doesn’t want to risk any Quirk accidents where there’s nothing around to blame, even if he and Oboro have both gotten a lot better at controlling their Quirks through trial and error.

“Alright, alright,” Izuku snorts out an amused breath, standing after the ghost as he slides his hands into the pocket of his All Might sweatshirt. Oboro is grinning so widely his eyes are “I’m comin’.”

He breathes out a light laugh as the ghost, bouncing on his feet in excitement, phases through the door the same way he’d come in. He usually likes to wait for Izuku to open the door, so he must really be excited. The green-haired boy shakes his head as he opens his dorm door.

School had ended a couple hours ago, but it’s still a few hours until curfew. The common area is mostly empty; well, besides where Kaminari is passed out on the couch. He’d been there since just after school ended though, after he’d tried to break his record of charging ten of the of classmates’ phones at once and completely wore himself out. He was very close to short-circuiting, and Izuku’s sure he would’ve if Kirishima had handed him the eleventh phone.

Izuku sits quietly on the other end of the couch, glancing fondly at Kaminari before focusing on his phone while he waits. He watches some videos with the volume on low as to not disturb his sleeping classmate.

When Oboro returns from where Izuku suspects he’d been checking on Shota’s arrival status, the ghost leans on the back of the couch and watches over Izuku’s shoulder. They only end up watching for a couple minutes before Izuku hears the doors open, and there’s voices talking. Shota’s and... is that Hitoshi?

“Surprise!” The ghost mock whispers, grin widening when Izuku glances back at him.

“*What?*”

“Problem Child,” Izuku jerks his attention to where Shota and Hitoshi are stood in the doorway, both watching Izuku. The teen on the couch pockets his phone and swallows, swatting uselessly at the air over his shoulder— wishing he could hit the ghost— he gives the uncle-nephew duo a sheepish smile as he settles the hand he’d been waving against the back of his neck and rubs awkwardly.

“Ah, s-sorry,” Izuku bows his head apologetically, if only to apologize for being weird, “I, uh, I heard a fly. Um, annoying little things, aren’t they?”

Oboro squawks in offense behind him, and it takes Izuku’s entire self-restraint to not turn and see the face the ghost is making. That’ll raise more questions though, so he keeps his eyes on his guardian and friend.

Hitoshi looks amused, eyes flicking behind the couch like he’s looking for Oboro, while Shota just sort of looks tired. The underground Hero regards the teen at his side, then looks slowly towards Izuku before his attention flicks to Kaminari’s lightly snoring frame.

The underground Hero visibly bites back another sigh as he nods towards Kaminari, “do I even want to know?”

“Well—”

“Actually,” Shota cuts him off fondly, eyes flicking from the blonde to the green-haired teen, “just tell me whether or not he needs to see Recovery Girl. I won’t ask why he’s passed out on the couch if the answer is no.”

“No,” Izuku laughs softly, “he’s just asleep. He was pushing limits, but he didn’t short-circuit.”

Shota’s quiet for a second before his face settles into one of deadpan, “how many?”

Izuku snorts a laugh, glancing fondly at Kaminari, “ten. Almost eleven.”

It’s hilarious that Shota knows them all well enough to know exactly what they would’ve gotten up to in his absence. And how he knew exactly how Kaminari had almost overused his Quirk from nothing more than Izuku’s not very explanatory explanation.

“This is why I can never leave you gremlins alone,” Shota does sigh

now, deep and heavy as he rubs at his eyes, “as long as he’s okay. Hopefully he doesn’t completely ruin his sleep schedule by napping so late in the evening. Last thing I need is a *tired* Kaminari during Heroics tomorrow.”

“One to talk,” Oboro scoffs, once against leaning against the back of the couch on crossed arms. Izuku doesn’t need to look back to know he ghost has one ankle kicked up over his calf as he leans.

The ghost’s words surprised Izuku just because he wasn’t expecting them. He bites his tongue to keep from letting out a squeak of laughter.

“Nawh, uncle Sho,” Hitoshi teases with a plain expression, “it sounds like you actually *like* your 1-A class. Cute. You’re ruining your hardass reputation, y’know.” The purple-haired teen pauses, glancing at Izuku, then Kaminari, “also, I have no idea what you’re talking about. Is this a 1-A thing I won’t understand? It’s like middle school all over again.”

Shota turns to glare down at a sharply grinning Hitoshi, “I will return you, brat.”

“No takesy-backsies,” Hitoshi waggles a finger. “I’m wounded, uncle Sho. Truly. You fought so hard for me, and now you’re threatening to give me back? Waste of efforts and *illogical*.”

“This was a mistake,” Shota huffs, crossing his arms over his chest as his shoulders slump. “I regret my decision. I should expel you— and I would do just that if I wasn’t *terrified* of what your mother would do to me if I did.”

“Well, it can’t be any worse than the time you lost me at the park.” Hitoshi snorts a laugh as he playfully bumps his shoulder against his uncle’s arm. “She didn’t even talk to you for like an entire week.”

“That’s after she beat me with her shoe,” Shota agrees with a grimace. “I’ve been stabbed before, and I can honestly say that being *impaled* hurt less than your mother *whacking* me with her rubber slippers. Rubber slippers hurt far more than you think they would.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Hitoshi shrugs, “she’s never hit me.”

“Because you’re the baby,” Shota snarks, “that used to be me, you know. It’s alright to abuse her *little brother*, but she’d never aim to hurt her *baby* no matter what stupid and reckless shit you pull. Tricking a dangerous villain with your Quirk which you currently have literally

no right to use for example."

To emphasis his point, Shota snakes a hand out to playfully pinch Hitoshi's cheek.

The purple-haired teen swats him away with a glare, "you're sounding a little jealous there, uncle Sho."

Shota lightly plants his hand on the side of Hitoshi's face, pushing the teen away from him by his head. The teen wobbles as he tries to steady himself, straightening with a sharper, yet playful glare.

"You... lost Hitoshi?" Izuku asks with a cocked eyebrow.

He's also trying to imagine Yua hitting Shota with a rubber slipper. She's always seemed so kind— he's not sure he can picture it. He doesn't doubt it happened, but he can't imagine it.

"Hitoshi wandered away," Shota shakes his head. "I don't know why I was blamed entirely for four-year-old Hitoshi deciding he wanted to go to the shops across the street for some ice cream. He was old enough to know to stay with me. Plus, I would've taken you— you probably could've used your Quirk on me back then too. But *nooo*, little Hitoshi wanted to be *independent* and give his uncle a stroke."

"Look," Hitoshi huffs in defense, "if you'd found a ¥1000 note on the ground, you'd want ice cream too. It's either very poor planning to put an ice cream shop across from the park, or it's *genius* marketing. Definitely caught little me's eye. Besides, you can't blame me for you not paying attention."

"You were in a slide the last time I saw you, brat," Shota snorts in offense, "I don't even know which end you disappeared through. I should've known then, after that *Houdini* act, that you'd make a good underground Hero."

Hitoshi pauses thoughtfully before letting out a humored laugh, "righttt, I forgot about that. That's where I found the ¥1000; it was at the bottom of the slide."

"How'd you find Hitoshi?" Izuku asks as he bites back a laugh.

"*He* found *me*," Shota shakes his head in exasperation, "walked right up beside me holding a melted mess of rainbow swirled ice cream that was *everywhere*. Then he had the *nerve* to ask me what I was looking for. I should've left you at the park."

Hitoshi snorts a laugh into his own hand, looking torn between pride and embarrassment. He glances sideways at Shota before straightening up and crossing his arms over his chest. His lips still twitch upwards into a smile even as he tries to keep his expression blank.

“If you found him,” Izuku’s voice wavers with a poorly contained laugh, “how did his mom find out?”

“The brat *tattled* on me,” Shota scoffs, glaring sideways at Hitoshi. “Hardly even made it through the door before telling her he ‘crossed the street all by himself’. Not to mention he was still covered in melted ice cream, which I *also* got in trouble for. My life flashed before my eyes— I still don’t even know how she got her shoe off so fast.”

Neither Izuku nor Hitoshi can hold in their laughs, and even Oboro is snickering behind Izuku. Shota narrows his eyes on the two of them, glancing between them. Still, despite how he tries to keep his expression neutral, he does end up cracking a small smile that he bites back just as fast as it appeared.

“Wait, um, as excited as I am to see you, Hitoshi, um,” Izuku pauses, looking between the uncle and guardian, “what’re you doing here? Just, you don’t usually come to the 1-A dorms and... I was just wondering what... um, what’s happening?”

“Surprise!” the ghost whispers excitedly behind Izuku for the second time, and once again the teen twitches to look back at him. He would ask Oboro not to talk when Shota’s around if it wasn’t so mean. He’d rather his guardian think he’s weird than limit Oboro’s already limited ability to interact. “You’ll love this!”

Izuku keeps his attention on the two in front of him, even as he wants to look back at Oboro.

“It’s really Hitoshi’s news to share,” Shota shrugs, shoulders slumping as he glances sideways at his nephew, “there’ll be a class announcement later, but for now he can tell whoever he’d like. I’ve got some paperwork to fill out, so Izuku, would you mind giving ‘toshi a tour of the dorms?”

“Oh!” Izuku cocks his head in confusion, “of course not; I don’t mind but—”

“Good,” the man’s lips twitch up in a smile. “Saves me the trouble. You both know where to find me. Come see me after you’re finished

with the tour. It's not much different from the Gen Ed dorms, but still familiarize yourself with the space. I've inspected Mineta's old dorm briefly but let me know if there's any problems with it."

"Sure," Hitoshi nods casually, tucking his hands in the pockets of his black hoodie.

Izuku glances between the two in confusion, "okay, um, let's go then, 'toshi, I'll show you around."

"And I'll tell you *why* while you're doing it," the purple-haired teen snickers.

Izuku gives a nod, standing from the couch. Hitoshi crosses the floor to join him in the living area of the common room, as Shota turns swiftly and disappears in the direction of the elevator.

"Well," Izuku chews on his bottom lip, gesturing around him, "this, obviously, is the common area. We're all pretty comfortable with each other, so it's not uncommon to find someone asleep out here. We all try to be respectful when it happens.

"The kitchen is right over there. We do class movie nights sometimes and meals together most nights. There's a cooking schedule too, so we all divvy up the chores. I... think Sensei's right. Uh, about the layouts being similar, at least. It's pretty open floor plan, so you shouldn't have much of a problem finding your way. Um, whenever you're here... There's an elevator up to the dorm rooms, but most of us just use the stairs since it's faster."

"Looks just like ours," Hitoshi nods, keeping pace with Izuku as he leads him towards the stairs.

"I don't think it'll change much," Izuku tells him, holding the stairwell door open for Hitoshi to go through. "All the dorm buildings look fairly uniform, so it's a given the insides would be similar as well."

"Right," Hitoshi nods. The purple-haired teen pauses as they trek up the stairs, looking around them before turning to Izuku, "so... did Ro move into this place with you and my uncles? I never knew if he was an *apartment* ghost, or if he's, like, a *people* ghost. Are, uh, you haunted, or the apartment itself?"

"He's, um, he's here," Izuku gestures up to where Oboro had skipped the stairs and was waiting at the top of the current flight, "he's definitely a people ghost."

“The apartment is just so stuffy, y’know?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Izuku huffs with a dismissive wave of his hand, “you're a big liar, we both know you just like your human interaction.”

“Oh, wow, he really is here right now,” Hitoshi glances around again, like the knowledge the ghost is here will suddenly change the stairwell. His eyes drift up to where Izuku had gestured, eyes narrowing thoughtfully, “hey, Ro, it’s been a while.”

“Someone appreciates my presence,” Oboro pouts, waving at Hitoshi despite the fact he’s invisible.

“He says hi,” Izuku translates as he continues up the stairs, “well, he waved. I guess. And whined a little, but the sentiment’s there. He’s happy you’re here.”

“I was not whining!” Oboro’s pout puckers into an even more dramatic one. “You’re so mean, Izu-chan. I also do *not* pout.”

“Bold for someone pouting to say,” Izuku teases, settling at the top stair beside Oboro as he waits for Hitoshi to catch up. Oboro glares halfheartedly at Izuku, nose wrinkling in offense. “I’m *kidding*. You totally don’t pout. He’s the toughest of men, ‘toshi.”

Hitoshi snickers into his hand, glancing at Izuku’s side like he can see the ghost there, “you say about the secret romance novel loving softie?”

“Well, he likes the romance films too,” Izuku adds with a laugh, ignoring the way Oboro squawks in betrayal.

“You two can’t bully me when I can’t defend myself to both of you!” Oboro accuses, but he does laugh a little, “you’ve gotta translate for me better, ‘zuku. This is teaming up, and it’s rude. And everyone has their own guilty pleasures. Tell ‘toshi.”

Izuku laughs at Oboro before turning to look at Hitoshi, “he says it’s a guilty pleasure.”

“What’re you guilty for, Ro?” Hitoshi cocked his head as a sharp smile curls on his lips, “the *rated* stuff?”

“Y’know, I don’t like your friends,” Oboro huffs dramatically. The ghost eyes Hitoshi before letting out a good-natured laugh. “There’s nothing wrong with enjoying a good romance novel— they're cute!

You're just mad you can't land a date, 'toshi. I used to be so popular with the ladies, so now I live vicariously through the characters."

"We're just teasing," Izuku consoles, even though he knows the ghost is playing just as much. Still, his words are more a warning for Hitoshi that they've hit the limit. He doesn't want to be mean, even if Oboro can take a joke. Pushing too far isn't something Izuku wants to do. "I like a good rom-com too sometimes. And you watched that new one with us, 'toshi, so we can't bully him too much."

"Yeah, alright," Hitoshi gives a light laugh, "it was a pretty good movie. Not usually my type, but it was good. A bit sappy at the end though."

"It was *not* sappy, you're just *uncultured*—"

"Okay, okay," Izuku calls attention back, "let's get back to the tour before Shota thinks we got lost in the building. I've been living here for weeks; I'd never hear the end of that. Plus, some of my classmates are in their dorms, so let's not disturb them. I know Todoroki is probably working on his homework right now, and I think Kirishima is in his room too."

"You're in charge," Hitoshi shrugs as he follows after Izuku. "So, which one's yours?"

Izuku leads Hitoshi down the line of doors. There're only four dorms on this floor, but he tells the purple-haired teen who lives where. He's not sure Hitoshi has really met most of 1-A, but he tells the other teen which floor everyone lives on in case the information is useful to Hitoshi.

He doesn't tour him around on each individual floor though since he's not as familiar with the floors in the boys' dorms he doesn't go too often, and he rarely visits the girls' side of the dorms. He still tells Hitoshi which of the girls are on each floor.

"This is my room," Izuku tells him, pushing his own door open. His homework is still scattered across his desk, and Oboro's book of the week is on the bed from that morning where he'd read while Izuku had gotten ready. "All the dorms look like this, just... most are more personalized. I don't have a lot of stuff, and there's three bedrooms I go between, so it's sparsely decorated."

"Wow, we need to get you some stuff," Hitoshi decides after peering into the room. "I thought your room at the apartment was bland— do

I even want to see how little personality the room upstairs has? How have my uncles let you live in a *school brochure dorm room*?"

"Probably not," Izuku snorts a laugh. "And they don't mind if I don't mind."

He's not embarrassed or anything— he just doesn't have much stuff, and what he does have is Hero themed which... well he's found that after having his whole world shifted upside down, collectibles aren't the most important thing in the world. Though he still adores his collection, and he's glad to have gotten it back.

Maybe he just doesn't want to get too comfortable anywhere again— it would *kill* him to have to pack up his stuff a second time around.

Hitoshi gives an unamused look as he steps back, letting Izuku shut the door after them. He seems to have decided to let it go for now. "So, the room beside you is the empty dorm, right? The one that belonged to the kid who got expelled? What even happened to him? There were rumors, but no one's really said anything trustworthy."

"Mineta? Yeah," Izuku nods with a grimace. "I'd tell you, but I think there's an investigation going on. I don't know what's allowed to be said, and what isn't but... he wasn't a very good guy. Most of us were glad to have him gone. Anyways, I think the door's unlocked, so we can look inside."

Izuku lets Hitoshi be the one to turn the knob to the room next door, but he does follow the other boy in. The dorm furniture is all still set up as Mineta had arranged it, Izuku faintly remembers from when they'd done tours of everyone's rooms when they'd first moved in, but it's now lacking all the décor and personality he remembers Mineta having.

A lot less lewd female Pro Hero merch.

"It's nice," Hitoshi offers as he steps over to the balcony doors. "Spacious too, and it doesn't look like the perv did much damage. I like the balcony; makes the place feel bigger."

Izuku nods along, glancing around Mineta's old room.

It's not much different than Izuku's own, but he can't say it wouldn't have been nice to have a corner unit. Only one side of neighbors, not that he minded being between Mineta and Todoroki.

Todoroki is a very respectful neighbor, and Mineta was alright too.

“I’m happy with it,” Hitoshi decides, and it’s then Izuku’s mind sputters to a stop.

He’s happy with it?

What does that mean?

“I like my new neighbor; I know that much. Definitely better than the ones I don’t talk now. And I can rearrange the furniture so it doesn’t look so clustered and— hey, do you think my uncle’ll be able to hook me up with a new mattress? I don’t trust sleeping on anything that perverted grape slept on. Who knows what he did on there. I’d rather throw myself off the balcony.”

“He says things like *that*, but *I’m* the raunchy one. Figures.” Oboro huffs, leaning against the door frame. “So, you figured out the surprise yet, ‘zuku?”

“You’re moving in here?” Izuku gapes, wide eyes turning to Hitoshi.

Hitoshi turns towards him with a cocked eyebrow and a light teasing smile, “what gave me away?”

“Don’t be sarcastic now,” Izuku scolds, even as he smiles widely as the information sinks in, “what do you mean? You’re really moving in here? Into 1-A dorms; this dorm? We’ll be neighbors! When? Wait, *why*?”

“That tends to be what happens when you transfer classes,” Hitoshi grins, his own excitement shining through despite how he tries to hide it. “Nezu finally approved my Heroics transfer! Uncle Sho’s been petitioning my ability to transfer even though I didn’t place during the Sports Festival. He’s been working on this since the Sports Festival, and it’s *finally* happening!”

“It’s really happening?” Izuku is bouncing on his toes, “seriously? Hitoshi, that’s amazing! I’m so excited for you! You’ve been waiting so long! And I know you’ve been working so hard! This is awesome!”

“Thanks,” Hitoshi beams. It’s almost an odd expression on Hitoshi’s usually neutral face, but Izuku decides he likes seeing the awestruck excited look. “I didn’t think it would be a possibility this year, since no one’s been expelled until that grape, and I didn’t place in the Sports Festival. Uncle Sho said he’d keep trying, but I wasn’t hopeful,

y'know? Thought I'd have to kick your ass next year to get noticed."

"Wait, wait," Izuku finally settles on the whole of his feet, "how *are* you even able to transfer? I thought they did only happen after the Sports Festival—I mean, they're rare, definitely; wasn't Shota one of the last Gen-Ed transfers into Heroics? How is this even possible? Why now?"

"This is where it gets interesting," Hitoshi tells him smugly, settling against the edge of the desk, "All Might vouched for me to Nezu; talked about how *useful* my Quirk is, and how the school is letting my potential go to waste by having me in Gen Ed. He requested the transfer after the spot in 1-A opened— Nezu even said All Might brought the idea up *before* the grape guy was expelled."

"He did?" Izuku gasps, "no way! I'm so happy for you! You really do deserve to be in this class! *Ro* told me about what you did that day— and Shota and Hizashi did too! It was incredible— the school has really been sleeping on how insanely *powerful* your Quirk is! Just think of what you can do with actual Quirk training!"

"Yeah," Hitoshi huffs a pleased breath, "I suspect it's got to do with that weird-ass villain who worked with the guys who kidnapped you and Bakugou too. I mean, the Number One Hero *personally* requested my transfer. I must've done something right."

"Yeah, well, that really was dangerous though," Izuku chides lightly. He knows he has no room to talk, but still feels the need to remind Hitoshi. "That villain was no joke, I mean, I saw *All Might* struggling. And you really could've gotten into big trouble for unlicensed Quirk usage— it wasn't very much fun."

"But it really was cool," Oboro chimes in from the doorway. "It was super dangerous though; I swear my heart stopped in my chest when I heard his voice that day."

"Yeah, yeah, trust me, I've heard all of this before. My mom, and uncle Sho still haven't—" Hitoshi freezes eyes shooting to Izuku, where he gapes in surprise as his eyebrow slowly arches in interest, "hang on, when did *you* get in trouble for *unlicensed Quirk usage*?"

Izuku tenses, staring wide-eyed at the other teen, "w-well um..."

"Confidential."

"*C-confidential*! Yes! That's right, it's um, it's confidential. T-thank you,

Ro." Izuku sucks in a relieved breath, rubbing at the back of his neck as he turns to smile sheepishly at Hitoshi, "um, sorry, Hitoshi, but it's very confidential. Um. Very."

Oboro rolls his eyes fondly, "you'd be so lost without me, man."

"Boo," Hitoshi puckers his lips, "that's no fun. Even now that I'm technically a 1-A student too? C'mon, help a new kid out. Let me in on a 1-A secretttt."

"Well... um, most of 1-A doesn't even know what happened," Izuku nervously shuffles his feet as he avoids catching Hitoshi's eyes in fear he'll crack, "a-and I'm reallyyy not allowed to say anything. We could both get in trouble; I shouldn't have even mentioned it—"

"Relax," Hitoshi shakes his head with an easy half-smile, "I won't push. And the secret is safe with me. No one in 1-A will find out of your *less than legal* escapades."

Oboro snorts a bright laugh as he tries to hide behind his hand, "that's hilarious. It *was* a less than legal escapade between you, Tenya and Todoroki.

Izuku looks away from the ghost sharply, then looks away from a proud looking Hitoshi. He just knows his entire face has lit up in a flush, "it wasn't like that—"

"Just let it go," the ghost tells him as his laughter dies down, "shouldn't you be finishing up the tour anyways?"

"Oh right, the tour!" Izuku gasps. "I still have to show you the communal showers and then we've gotta get upstairs to the apartment before Shota comes looking for us!"

"Well, lead the way then, Tour Guide," Hitoshi shrugs, leading Izuku out of the room. "I also have communal showers in my dorm though, so if you want to skip it, we can. Plus, I won't even be moving in until this weekend."

"Oh," Izuku tilts his head in question, "when do you start classes with us?"

"Not really for a while. I mean, I'll be a part of your core subject classes just because all first years have the exact same curriculum, but I won't be starting Heroics classes with you for a while. I'll be working with uncle Sho while you're all away on your internships since I can't

participate in those without a provisional license."

"Oh," Izuku frowns as they trek up the stairs side by side.

Hitoshi shakes his head with a light smile, "there's another exam in about a month; a big one held in Tokyo that uncle Sho hopes to take me to if everything goes to plan, so hopefully I won't be too far behind. That'll give me some time to play catch-up if I work extra hard. I may even get *my* license before *Kacchan*."

"He'd probably punch you if he heard you call him that," Izuku bites back a smile, "and that's... not really the type of motivation that'll get you a Hero license..."

"Motivation's motivation," Hitoshi shrugs, "Whatever gets me to where I need to be to get that license. And you can't tell me it wouldn't be a little bit funny. The Gen Ed kid months behind your class getting a license before the egotistical blockhead who claimed supremacy during the Sports Festival?"

"It is pretty funny," Oboro chimes, which earns him a glare from Izuku.

"What? It is!" the ghost huffs when he notices the glare, hands lifting in surrender. "He's right."

"Uh huh," Izuku snorts, "neither of you like Kacchan, I get it."

"Admit it would be funny," Hitoshi bumps his shoulder against Izuku's until the green-haired teen cracks a smile. "You think it's funny. C'mon, admit it now. You smiled."

"Okay," Izuku bites his bottom lip to keep from smiling, "that may be a *little* funny. But it's still mean."

"He's mean too," Oboro reminds, keeping pace with them. "I know that; you know that. Hitoshi knows that, and he's only met the guy like twice."

"I'll be nice to him when he's nice to me," Hitoshi shrugs, "and we both know that won't happen. We don't all have the same '*kill 'em with kindness*' mentality nice guys like you have. If he's gonna be an asshole to me, I'm going to return the favor."

"That— okay, well, that's actually fair. Just remember he's *trying* to be a bit nicer, alright?"

“And that’s a terrifying thought,” Hitoshi furrows his brow, glancing sideways. “*This* is his nice? He called me ‘Eyebags’ when he passed me in the hallway the other day; then he told me to get out of his way. You really are too nice for your own good if you believe him.”

“Let’s just stop talking about Kacchan,” Izuku gives a nervous laugh. “Anyways, we’re at the apartment, so you,” Izuku glances knowingly at Oboro, “shush.”

“You’re mean to your ghost,” Hitoshi accuses playfully, eyebrow quirking in amusement.

“Yeah,” Oboro grins, “you are.”

Izuku lets out a groan, opening the apartment door, “get inside.”

It’s late when Izuku stumbles into the kitchen.

He’s hoping to find a box of chamomile tea hidden in the cupboard, maybe even a box of Yaoyorozu’s nice teas that he’ll apologize for having some of and thank her excessively for tomorrow morning should he find it.

He’s just so restless; tossing and turning in bed.

He’d been trying to sleep for the past two hours and hasn’t been successful. It’s been a long time since he’d struggled with insomnia like this, and it reminds him of how much he hates it.

As he walks towards the kitchen, he can’t help but notice the light that’s off flickering on. He fists at his eyes just to make sure he’s not seeing things when the light shuts off again. He pauses for just a second in surprise, blinking as the light turns back on.

What is happening in there?

The light shuts off again with a light click of the light switch.

Izuku forces himself to move, stepping close to the doorway so he can peer in.

He’s not expecting to find a frantic Kaminari frozen in the middle of the room, glaring up wide-eyed at the lighting fixture. Kaminari’s attention whips towards the doorway when the floor squeaks under Izuku’s weight.

Kaminari looks *scared*, but relief settles in his gaze when he identifies his classmate.

“Midoriya,” the other boy sucks in when he sees Izuku peering in, “this building is *haunted*.”

It’s too late at night for this. He just wants some tea and some sleep.

“...what?”

“The lights!” Kaminari insists, looking up towards the light fixture. “I turn them on, I’m mean, I gotta be able to see. I was just trying to sneak some of Kiri’s Pocky, but right when I got to grab the box— *boom*, I’m in the dark. So, I do what anyone would; I question if that really just happened, because a *light* turning off by *itself* is insane, so I pretend it never happened and I turn it back on.”

Izuku wrinkles his nose in thought. He doesn’t even need to look further into the room, to the side where the light switch is to know someone is there with it.

“But Midoriya,” the golden-haired teen steps closer, voice dropping like something could be hearing him. And something *is* if the poorly contained giggles are anything to go by. “Listen. It happened *again*. Four times. That can’t be a fluke; I turn the light back on, and-and *something* turns them off! This building is haunted! I’m calling it! We need to move!”

“Kaminari,” Izuku glances around the kitchen before dragging his fingers up through his curls. “Calm down a little. Take a breath.”

“You don’t believe me!” Kaminari squawks, glaring up at the ceiling, “c’mon ghostie— show Mido the lights! C’mon, work with me here, Ghost! Show ‘im! W-what the hell! I-I'm serious, Midoriya, the lights were—”

“I believe you,” Izuku insists, finally stepping into the room enough that he can shoot the ghost with a shit-eating grin a subtle glare, “listen, ghosts are just assholes—”

“Hey!” Oboro makes a wounded sound, “and from my best friend too!”

“—They like to mess with you. I... I’m sure this ghost is just a prankster, right?”

“A prankster ghost?” Kaminari shoots Izuku and uncertain look, “how’d ya know? And wait, how do you know so much about ghosts?”

“O-oh, um, one of the, um, the houses I lived in when I was little had a ghost...”

It’s the truth. Izuku vividly remembers an older woman had lived in the same small house Izuku remembers living in with his mother and father when he was tiny. It was a year or so before he was diagnosed Quirkless and his father left them.

It’s that strange period of time where he’d started to be able to recall things, but not entirely.

This is one of his solid memories though.

The woman was old— like she'd died over a *hundred* years ago. Izuku remembers his mother and father talking about the house’s *history*, because it too was over a hundred years old. That was the last time they ever lived in a house or complex that wasn’t newly built.

The ghost had meant no harm; she was mostly just interested in the modern technology. Mainly the television in the living room. Izuku always saw her studying it, and sometimes she'd try to make it turn on as well.

She was kind enough; grandmotherly to him but tight about respect and rules. Izuku knows now, when he thinks back to how she’d spoken and regarded him, that it was generational differences.

“It was like, *really* haunted,” he continues lightly, looking away from how Kaminari was studying him thoughtfully. “They’d turn lights on and off and turn the tv on sometimes. I don’t think they ever meant to scare me, just... I think they were bored, y’know? Never meant anything bad. M-most ghosts don’t, I don’t think... Still, it never really happened with my mom in the room. Just me.”

“To be fair,” Oboro calls Izuku’s attention. The green-haired teen glances over quickly, “I *did* mean to scare him. But I am bored. Nothing happens at night, especially when Shota doesn’t have patrol. I finished my book while you were trying to sleep.”

“That’s pretty scary, Midoriya,” Kaminari offers, looking skeptically around the room like he’ll spot Oboro. “It’s also pretty cool. I’ve never seen a ghost before— didn't even really believe until, y’know, *now*. You really think this ghost is just playing? No harm?”

“Only ever *emotional* harm,” Izuku drawls, letting a small smile curl onto his lips so Kaminari knows he’s kidding. Mostly. The golden-haired teen lets out a tiny laugh as he rubs at the back of his neck, still glancing around cautiously. Izuku continues anyways, “they really can be jerks though. But yeah, they’re probably just messing with you. I mean, it stopped when I got here, right?”

“Oh yeah...” Kaminari still looks spooked, but his tense shoulders relax a bit, “alright. You are the *ghost expert*, right? That story is wild, whereas I’ve never seen a ghost before. This will totally take some getting used to— and I just know no one will believe me tomorrow. Ghosts really *are* jerks. N-no offense, Ghost! You're cool; we’re cool. *Please* don’t haunt me.”

“Man, I love the gullible ones,” Oboro teases, finally stepping away from the light switch. He hadn’t touched it since Izuku arrived, but the grin on the ghost’s face can’t mean anything good. Oboro gives Izuku one of those squinty-eyed grins as he reaches up and closes the cupboard Kaminari had been searching through.

It’s not a loud noise by any means, but it does still echo through the night. Kaminari jolts in surprise, swirling around to stare open-mouthed at the now shut cupboard.

“D-did that just...” the other boy swallows, glancing back at Izuku, “you know what? I need to go to sleep now. I clearly angered the kitchen ghost, and I’m sorry for that. I won’t take anyone else’s snacks! I swear! I’ll be good, don’t haunt me!”

Kaminari backs away to the doorway, not taking his eyes off the cupboard that shut by itself. “Good night, Midoriya. Um, be careful? A-and don’t touch Kiri’s Pocky, whatever you do.”

“I won’t,” Izuku bites back an amused snort, instead shooting his friend a small half-smile, “good night.”

Kaminari flees the kitchen just after that. He looks back once, scanning the kitchen like he’ll spot a ghost just before disappearing through the doorway.

Izuku waits a minute, listening for any footsteps receding before turning fully to where Oboro had settled himself on the counter in front of the cupboard he shut, “seriously?”

“What?” the ghost raises his hands in surrender, “is it wrong for a guy to have a bit of fun?”

“No,” Izuku wrinkles his nose as he beelines for the cabinet that houses the teas and other various drinks— instant coffee, coffee grounds and protein powder. He digs through the neat lines of tea boxes, finding the chamomile. “It is wrong, however, for a guy having fun to do so by scaring people in the middle of the night. That’s cruel.”

“I just wanted to scare him a bit,” Oboro huffs, eyes following Izuku as he moves to the dishes cupboard. The teen pulls out his favorite mug. “I saw him sneaking around in here, and I just wanted to... spook him a bit. Plus it was a little funny. I might’ve gone a little overboard, but his reactions were *hilarious*. The blondes are always the gullible ones.”

“Hizashi is blonde.”

“And he’s *exactly* who I was talking about,” Oboro snickers.

“Y’know, this all makes you sound like a jerk,” Izuku accuses with a shake of his head. “Kaminari now thinks you’re some angry *Pocky guardian spirit* that he’s pissed off by trying to take some of Kirishima’s snacks *which* he doesn’t mind sharing by the way. What were you even doing walking around out here? You were reading when I went to bed, and when you’re gone, you’re usually with Shota and Hizashi. Why the kitchen?”

“I’ve taken up night patrol around here,” Oboro tells him, chest puffing out. “It gives me something to do when everyone’s asleep. A job to do. And if I find anything, I’ll report it to you, and you can report it to Shota. Smart, right?”

“So, you’re the 1-A dorm warden now, but when students are out of their beds past curfew you scare the shit outta them?” Izuku shoots the ghost an unimpressed look as he fills the kettle, “you’re going to get yourself in trouble— what if Kaminari tells Shota?”

“Shota doesn’t believe in ghosts,” Oboro tells him confidently.

“And the rest of my class? Hizashi?” Izuku arches an eyebrow as he waits for the kettle to boil. Oboro wilts. “You can’t just scare them at night. And not repeatedly. You can mess with them a bit, there’s really no harm in that— especially with the ghost rumor surely to spread now, but don’t genuinely scare them. That’s *not* cool.”

“So... should I apologize to Kaminari?” Oboro asks seriously, looking scolded and a bit worried.

“And how would you do that?” Izuku snorts tiredly, pouring the boiling water into his cup. “I think a ghost apologizing to him would scare him more, just... reign it in a little. Test the waters before jumping in. Some people are scared of ghosts. They shouldn’t be scared to live in the dorms.”

“Right,” Oboro nods seriously, thoughtfully. “I never meant to *actually* scare anyone. I guess I forget living customaries after only watching for so long. I just get excited with so many of the students around all the time. There’s always something going on. So many people around.”

“Please don’t stalk the students,” Izuku frowns, “me, Sho and ‘zashi are fair game— Hitoshi and Kacchan too since they at least know of your existence, but don’t be weird.”

“Got it, got it,” Oboro pouts. “I’ll behave.”

“Thank you,” Izuku bows his head gratefully.

The ghost pauses, chewing at his bottom lip as Izuku finally sips at his tea, “I guess that means I can’t write ‘I’m sorry’ in the mirror condensation after Kaminari showers?”

Izuku chokes on his sip of hot tea, coughing out a panicked: *“No!”*

Hitoshi starts classes with them the Monday after he moves into the dorms.

The class is ecstatic (most of them) to have a new twentieth classmate, which will eventually even out all the partner and small group exercises they do in classes.

Izuku’s just glad that Hitoshi lives next door to him, and that he’s in the chair behind him during class. It’s nice to have such a close (living) friend around. He loves Iida, Uraraka, Asui and Todoroki, but he hasn’t managed to get as close to them as he has to Hitoshi and Oboro.

Maybe it’s because Hitoshi already knows his secrets— about Izuku’s parental situation and the ghost seeing thing. He trusts his friends, and he really loves hanging out with them, but it’s just easier to relax around Hitoshi and Oboro. And Kacchan, but Izuku still wouldn’t count them as friends.

It's homeroom class now, and Shota had promptly settled against the wall in his sleeping bag after delivering the morning announcements. It's one of those rare mornings when no one really has anything to do —all their assignments are due in the following periods, so everyone just sort of sits.

It's Uraraka who throws the first paper ball.

Well, she's the first to wad it up, use her Quirk on it, bat it gently in the direction of the trash can before letting her hold on her Quirk drop. The paper ball lands perfectly in the can.

Sero is the first to really throw a paper ball towards the trash can— overthrowing it completely so the paper ball hits the wall and bounces to the floor behind the can. He pouts.

"That was fuckin' terrible," Kacchan snaps. His chin is rested in his palm, glaring at Sero.

"I'd like to see you do better," Sero huffs, gesturing to the trash can in a 'be my guest' sort of way.

Kacchan grits his teeth, balls up a loose sheet of paper from his backpack and launches it towards the trash can. It hits the rim, but misses. "I got closer than you and I'm further away. I'd like to see you shitty Extras do any better."

And that's what really sparks the paper toss event.

All of their classmates try their luck at tossing paper balls into the trash can. Some make it in— Aoyama who sits directly behind the bin manages by leaning forwards to ensure his ball makes it— while others undershoot or overshoot.

Koda undershoots to the point that his paper ball bounces off Mina's head (he apologizes frantically in sign language), and Shoji overshoots his strength to the point his paper ball bounces off the can and settles by Shota on the floor.

The class stares at the ball, all holding in a collective breath to see if it disturbs the teacher or not.

Shota doesn't move.

Izuku knows the man isn't asleep, and he's surprised that Shota hasn't said anything about the obvious game and loud whispers. It's not

productive, or logical, but everyone's getting along and they're being relatively quiet. He's listening to them though, probably making sure nothing gets out of hand.

The game continues after a silent moment where Shota doesn't move.

Izuku takes his turn, and misses. He's not really trying, just playing along. Kacchan snorts a laugh through his nose, but it doesn't feel mean. Oboro still glares heatedly at him.

Yaoyorozu goes after Izuku, getting close to the bin when she stands up for more of an angle, but doesn't manage to get it in. She smiles anyways as she sits down. No one's being heckled since few students have actually made it.

Izuku can't help but think it's nice.

Everyone just getting along. An easy game where they don't need Quirks— where no one is any more powerful than the person to follow after them.

Satou and Jirou both go, which leaves Hitoshi.

"I... don't know about this," Hitoshi glances at the trash can. He's the only one who hadn't prepared a paper ball for his turn.

"C'mon," Ashido eggs him on, "show us what you've got, new kid!"

"He's not new," Izuku frowns, turning to glance across the room at Ashido, "just a transfer. A lot of us worked with him during the Sports Festival."

"Yeah, right!" Uraraka agrees with a bob of her head, "we've been having lunch with Shinsou-kun for weeks now! Just because you haven't talked to him, doesn't mean he's new."

"*New to us* then," Hagakure giggles, the sleeve of her uniform flapping like she's waving a dismissive hand, "everyone else has gone, and homeroom will be over soon! He won't be able to try if Sensei wakes up, so you've gotta hurry!"

Hitoshi frowns, looking like he wants to decline. Izuku will back him up if he does, but he doesn't know why the purple-haired teen would do that. It's just throwing a paper ball.

"'toshi can't throw to save his life," Oboro explains as if he can hear

Izuku's thoughts, sitting cross-legged on the entirety of Izuku's desktop. He'd been watching the game quietly, unmoving from his position. "Has never been able to, not well, at least. No amount of practice has helped. The capture weapon he's working with is completely different, nothing like blindly throwing a ball like this. There's no way he'll make it from the back corner."

The ghost pauses, looking thoughtfully between the paper ball Hitoshi had just scrunched up and is now glaring thoughtfully at and the trash can across the room, "unless... hang on."

Izuku watches as Oboro slips off the desktop, following the ghost with just his eyes. Oboro studies the ball, hands tucked in his pocket, and then pulls a hand out and pinches a loose end of the paper ball between his fingers.

Izuku turns his head to Hitoshi when the teen shutters, wide eyes staring in front of him before jerking his attention desperately to Izuku for confirmation. The green-haired teen offers a tiny nod. Hitoshi forces himself to relax, settling back and letting the ghost continue, even with a perplexed expression.

"Hey, Izu, wanna see something cool?" Oboro asks with a grin. Izuku gives the ghost a little nod, eyeing him skeptically. "Then tell him to throw it. I'll do the rest. It'll go in, I promise!"

"I think you can make it, Hitoshi," Izuku tells him, loud enough for the class to see, "don't be modest, we both know you have perfect aim."

"'zuku I—" Hitoshi pauses sharply. He stares Izuku in the eyes for a long second, scrutinizing Izuku's expression before looking in front of him where Oboro is still standing. His fist tightens around the wad of paper, shooting Izuku a trusting look before laughing sheepishly, "I mean, I didn't wanna show off or anything. But if you insist."

Izuku is actually interested in what Oboro has planned. He shifts in his seat so he's facing the classroom instead of the front of the room, and watches closely.

Hitoshi sucks in a breath before arching his arms back.

Oboro, who still hadn't released his grip on the loose edge of the paper ball, stretches with Hitoshi's arch back. Hitoshi launches the ball, and Izuku's sure it would've gone sideways if it weren't for Oboro guiding it upwards and *following* it through the air weightlessly.

Izuku had known, logically, that Oboro could *float*— that he had no mass or body, so therefore he was able to do such things— but that doesn't prepare him for seeing such a feat. Oboro has a habit of walking instead of floating around; Izuku had honestly *forgotten* he was capable of this.

The paper flying across the room must look natural enough because no one questions it as it drops perfectly into the trash can when Oboro releases his grip. Izuku blinks in surprise before whipping back to look at Hitoshi.

He looks just as shocked.

Before the class manages to shake their awe and turn to look at Hitoshi, Izuku shoves Hitoshi's desk just enough to jostle him out of his stupor. Even as he forces his expression back to neutral, he still looks ecstatic that it had gone in. Ghost interference or not.

"Woah," Uraraka is the one to break the amazed silence, "that was amazing, Shinsou-kun!"

"Yeah!" Kirishima nods enthusiastically, "that was so *manly*, Shin-bro! How'd you even do that? It was like perfect—"

"No fuckin' way," Kacchan snaps, palms slamming on the desktop. He doesn't move from his seat despite how he turns back to glare at Hitoshi. "There is no way Eyebags just threw that perfectly. Not from where he's sitting. Noodle-Arms doesn't look like he's thrown a ball *ever*."

"Aren't you pleasant," Hitoshi replies drily, leaning back in his seat. "Looks can be deceiving."

"Kacchan," Izuku scolds under his breath, "that's not nice—"

"Can it, Nerd."

"I dunno, Bakugou," Kaminari shrugs, "looked pretty legit to me. I think Shinsou just has a good arm."

"And none of our classmates have a Quirk that could've aided him, so I don't see how it could've been rigged. Shinsou-kun's Quirk is Brainwash, nothing anti-gravity or agility wise," Yaoyorozu adds factually.

"What can I say?" Hitoshi laughs easily, eyes are still alit with awe,

“it’s a talent.”

“It’s a fluke is what it is, Eyebags,” Kacchan narrows his eyes, “do it again if it’s a natural talent. If you can’t, it was a fluke. It's just *shitty* luck.”

“Technically it would be *amazing* luck,” Iida corrects drily, to which Kacchan curls his lip in a snarl directed at the class rep across the room. “And please watch your language; we're young Heroes-in-training, we must always behave as such.”

“Whatever, Glasses,” Kacchan snaps as he returns his glare to Hitoshi. “Well? You takin’ a reshot, or are you gonna admit that was a fluke?”

“That’s actually a pretty fair ask,” Ojiro comments from his seat, “I mean, it was amazing the first time, but can you score a second?”

Hitoshi looks towards Izuku startled at the request; eyes pleading. Izuku lulls his attention towards Oboro, a silent question in his gaze.

Oboro is already looking at Izuku, like he’d been waiting for the question to arise.

The ghost grins triumphantly, “I’m going to make ‘toshi a 1-A *star*.”

Hitoshi makes three more perfect trash can goals. Each time Oboro flies through the air with each wadded-up ball of paper and the class watches on bated breaths before cheering. It really would be amazing, if Izuku couldn’t see the ghost soaring through the classroom to slam dunk the papers into the bin.

By the third perfect throw, the class believes Hitoshi is an expert thrower. Or that he has amazing aim. Oboro is puffed up at the praise Hitoshi is receiving, and Izuku is just happy both his friends are having a good time working together.

“This doesn’t look very productive,” Shota’s monotone voice startles everyone. He’s still curled up in his sleeping bag, but his eyes are open and he’s scanning the students thoughtfully. His face isn’t angry, or upset, just indifferent. Izuku swears he even sees amusement in that neutral expression.

“Ah, Sensei!” Iida stiffens, straightening his form, “I apologize for allowing my classmates to partake in such a—”

“Just make sure there’s no paper on the floor by the time the bell

rings. Each paper ball I find will be *five* laps during Heroics this afternoon. Don't let them stack up if you want to do anything besides running today."

The man's words have those closest to any ball of paper diving to pick them up.

Izuku takes the chaos to turn to a smirking Hitoshi.

"That was so fucking cool." Hitoshi is near vibrating as he whispers to Izuku, "Ro is *amazing*. 1-A thinks I'm *athletic*. Can you believe that? Me? Athletic? Pft."

"I am, aren't I?" Oboro preens at the praise, leaning against Izuku's desk as he flashes Hitoshi a wide grin, "just let him know the next time he's throwing stuff he's on his own. I'm not a show pony. This was just to get him in 1-A's good books because I've seen that pathetic throw— kid never would've lived it down, I mean, he probably would've ended up tossing it backwards by accident."

Izuku can't help but wonder if Hitoshi is really that awful at throwing.

Maybe they should play catch at some point?

"Well," Izuku snorts a laugh behind his hands, "you *will* be athletic when Shota gets his hands on you in an actual class where you're his assigned student. He takes our education very seriously. He, um, won't really be your uncle when he's making you run 'til ya dry heave. He's tough on the kids in his class."

"I'm definitely going to *die* then," Hitoshi groans, letting his forehead thump against his desktop. "He's hard on me as an uncle, he'll be insufferable to me as a teacher. He'll probably get a kick outta it too. Sadist."

"That he definitely is," Oboro agrees lightly, as he glances fondly to where Shota is finally unfurling from his sleeping bag. "He'll be super tough on 'toshi too, since he's so far behind the class. Plus, at school Yua can't bully Shota for bullying Hitoshi. He's got free reign and he will take advantage of it. Well, if I know Shota, at least. And trust me, I *know* Shota."

Izuku laughs, turning to face forwards again, even as Hitoshi jerks up.

"Oh God," Hitoshi groans louder, lifting his head so he's looking at Izuku, chin on the edge of the desk, "what did he say?"

“You’re screwed,” Izuku offers with a half-smile thrown over his shoulder. “Sorry.”

Oboro plays a lot of games with the kids living in the dorms. Izuku knows it.

He doesn’t even need to ask Oboro about it, because there’s literally no other explanation. He’s messing with them. He’s really thriving having so many people around—but Izuku can’t even say anything because he has taken a step back from scaring.

The ghost’s current favorite game is moving objects.

“I call it *lost and found*,” the ghost had laughed as Kacchan searched angrily for his missing earbud. Oboro had swiped it from the open case as Kacchan had looked down as he searched through his pockets for something. “You’ll never guess where I hid that— he certainly won’t!”

It was in Kacchan’s shoe at the door.

He didn’t find it until the next day when he *stepped* on it.

“You can’t put people’s things places they’ll get broken. Or never found again.” Izuku had scolded that night after having to endure a livid Kacchan all day. “I feel bad enough that *you* broke it that *I* might replace it. Why does it feel like I’m constantly babysitting? You’re older than me by fifteen years!”

“Okay, okay,” Oboro pouts, not looking up from his book, “I won’t hide anything *extra* good anymore. Even if Bakugou deserves it for his poor attitude. And just so you know, that was my *second* hiding place, but even I thought the toilet bowl was a little too mean.”

“New rule,” Izuku snorts, staring up at the ceiling, “no hiding *anything* in the toilet bowl. That’s gross.”

The earbud wasn’t the end of the game.

Oboro stole twelve of Jirou’s guitar picks. *Twelve*. Consecutively. Each time she’d lose one and grab another, he’d take the new one when she wasn’t looking, and the circle would continue.

Those were found in a neat little stack under the dining room table.

He kept stealing carrots from Koda’s rabbit, which in turn leads the

rabbit all through the dorms. That one was an accident. Oboro only lost the rabbit once. The class still spent three hours looking for the bunny who was ignoring Koda's calls.

Oboro steals a book from Iida that ends up in Uraraka's room, and bracelet that ends up in Iida's room. It's a good thing Iida has his name in all his books, and everyone's seen Uraraka wearing that specific bracelet.

They're both confused as the exchange missing belongings.

Kirishima loses a bandana that's later found in the boy's communal bathrooms. The poor guy gaslights himself into thinking he left it there, even if he remembers wearing it that morning, and showering the night before.

A candle goes missing from Tokoyami's room, and Dark Shadow insists it was stolen. That's later found under Tokoyami's bed and he just assumes it rolled off his desk. Dark Shadow does not agree. Very vocally does not agree.

Satou's favorite wooden spoon goes missing next, but that's later found in the communal kitchen's fridge. Satou looks bewildered but decides he probably left it there himself at some point.

At some point or another, Oboro manages to take something from each of Izuku's classmates and rehome it. Sometimes it's noticed right away, and other times it's not noticed until it's found.

"Y'know," Izuku says without looking up. Oboro is at Izuku's desk, watching an old movie on Izuku's laptop. The ghost makes a 'hm?' noise in reply. "You've got a Klepto problem, you do know that, right?"

"I haven't been caught yet," the ghost tells him smugly.

"You're a ghost," Izuku reminds in a deadpan, "no one can see you stealing their things."

"Good point," Oboro finally looks back, lips puckered. "Actually, it's kinda boring now anyways. No more *surprise*, y'know? And I think if I take anything else, your classmates will start blaming each other. I don't want that; it's for fun. Plus, I'm sorta surprised I got away with it for so long."

"Again, you're a ghost," Izuku snorts out. "There's no way you

wouldn’t get away with it.”

Oboro laughs, leaning back in the desk chair, “yeah, true. But now I just need to think of some new way to be a menace without scaring anyone. Any ideas?”

“You’re on your own,” Izuku shakes his head. “Just be a nice menace. And no wrecking anyone’s property. Or school property. And you’re still banned from the bathroom.”

“Sheesh,” Oboro laughs, “anything else?”

“No, that covers it for now,” Izuku shakes his head, looking back down at his phone.

Oboro follows his lead, looking back towards his film.

“Oh, and Oboro?” Izuku sees the ghost turn to look at him out of the corner of his eye but doesn’t look up. He stares sharply down at his phone screen, swiping through the app he’s in. He pauses for a moment, Oboro cocks his head in confusion at the delay.

"Where's my All Might figurine?”

Chapter End Notes

A few of you wanted to see some fluffy stuff between Oboro, Izuku and Hitoshi, and a couple others wanted to see Oboro and friends messing with 1-A, so that's where the idea of the chapter came from. I was trying to think how a ghost could interact without actually scaring or being too obvious. Hopefully it came together alright!

Yay for our favorite purple-haired bean finally getting into 1-A! I love 'zuku, 'toshi and Oboro friendship. They're adorable <3

I'm very tired, so I'll be going to bed now :) As always, I hope you guys enjoyed! Comments are greatly appreciated, and I love seeing kudos as well! I still can't believe this is over 10k kudos now! Thank you all so much for the support, and for continuing to read! <3

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

> This is another chapter I had a lot of fun playing around with! It's mostly fluff because I didn't think the last chapter had enough! I hope you guys have just as much fun reading as I had writing!
>
> Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The weekend after Hitoshi's first week in 1-A finds the two boys up in the apartment.

It's a Saturday, early in the evening.

Saturdays are the one day a week that the students have a 'defend for yourself' dinner in the dorms, where everyone's responsible for themselves. A lot of the students leave Saturday evening to spend the night and Sunday at home with their families, so making a class meal isn't really worth it when not everyone is around.

A lot of his classmates settle for instant ramen, while others take turns in the kitchen making stuff. Sometimes his peers who prefer to cook rather than making something microwavable or instant, make meals together to share, while others, like Kacchan, always end up making more than they can eat, which is usually mooched from them by other students swarming like seagulls (it's usually Kirishima, Ashido and Kaminari who want to share with Kacchan).

Saturdays tend to be the day he joins his guardians upstairs for dinner, and occasionally to sleep in the room upstairs when he's too tired to go back downstairs.

His guardians seem to really like it when Izuku joins them for dinner, and he doesn't really know why. Whenever he asks Oboro, the ghost just tends to roll his eyes in that dramatic over-the-top sort of way.

It really doesn't make much sense considering he sees them at school every day, and pops upstairs to visit when he has the chance and his classmates are distracted. It's not like they never see each other.

Still, it's nice spending time with his guardians instead of his teachers.

They're just different when they're not in a school setting, so maybe Izuku's different too when he's not in a school setting. When he's their foster kid and not their student.

Hitoshi has also made a habit of starting to join them since he'd been moved into the 1-A dorms. It's the second week he'd trailed up the stairs after Izuku and Oboro, making playful guesses of what Hizashi and Shota are making for dinner.

Izuku always knows, courtesy of Oboro who's always excited to tell him what's on the menu, but it's still fun to listen to Hitoshi guess.

They're in the living room now, Hizashi's gaming console plugged into the TV.

Izuku still sucks at shooter games, but he's found he likes racing games. To be fair though, he's gotten better at those shooter games with Oboro's coaching. And it's always nice to just shove the controller into Oboro's hands when Hitoshi is being a menace in game.

They're playing a racing game now, and Izuku is actually winning— well, in this specific race, at least.

He and Hitoshi are sitting side-by-side on the couch, and Oboro is at Izuku's side, sat on the arm rest of the couch with his feet kicked out across the cushions, just shy of touching Izuku. It's the ghost's current favorite place to sit; he likes the angle of the tv and is close enough that Izuku could toss him the controller if he wanted to.

It's not the *best* place for the ghost to sit, considering it looks like a fully open seat beside Izuku to anyone who can't see ghosts, and Oboro has had to flail backwards off the couch when Shota or Hizashi choose to sit there.

It's always hilarious.

Hizashi is in the kitchen, working on tempura shrimp and vegetables for dinner.

Oboro had been very excited to burst into Izuku's dorm room to tell him such— must've been one of the ghost's favorites. The apartment smells delicious, and Izuku honestly can't wait to eat.

Shota wasn't back from the school when he and Hitoshi arrived, but to be fair, Izuku had let them in because Hizashi had also gotten caught

up with a student after class.

It's not the first time Izuku had been alone in the on-campus apartment, but it's still strange.

There's nothing wrong with the apartment, not really, but it doesn't feel the same as the one off-campus. It's the strangest thing. He's got a key, and his room feels familiar enough, but it's just not the same.

Still, Hitoshi doesn't mind making himself at home, stripping off his blazer jacket as he beelines for the gaming console to set up for the two of them to play while they have some free time.

Hizashi comes home no more than a half an hour after them, smiling fondly when he sees the two boys on the couch already playing. It's domestic and familiar. The blonde had joined them in the living room for a while, Izuku and Hizashi passing the controller back and forth as Hizashi asks them about their days, and then the man had disappeared into the kitchen to start on dinner.

Shota was the last to arrive home.

Izuku is so focused on the game that he doesn't even realize his other guardian has returned home.

Not until: "catch."

The word is called from the side of the couch, almost by the door. The green-haired teen startles at Shota's voice and fumbles to do so, but the small projectile isn't heading for him. Hitoshi just barely manages to drop the controller into his lap as a small ball of paper lands in his fumbling hands.

"What?" the purple-haired boy demands in deadpan, "what is this? I was winning."

Izuku leans to the side to observe the ball like it's a trick question, or a riddle, or a puzzle or something, but it's just a regular sheet of paper wadded up into a ball.

Almost like— oh.

Oh no.

Hitoshi is now trying to uncrumple the paper as if his uncle would deliver a message via paper ball, but a sick feeling is settling in Izuku's

stomach as he watches the man out of the corner of his eye.

Shota's indifferent as he organizes himself in the genkan.

"You were very familiar with a paper ball in homeroom the other day," Shota calls back without looking away from untying his laces, "care to exhibit your *newfound* talent for me?"

Hitoshi still looks confused even as Izuku's eyes widen as they glance at each other.

Izuku sees the exact moment Hitoshi connects the dot. His expression drops into one of panic, eyes widening as he catches Izuku's own nervous eyes.

Shota is not looking at them, distracted in the genkan as he organizes the cluttered mess of shoes. Izuku feels a little bad he'd forgotten to line his shoes up, but to be fair, Hizashi had also kicked his shoes off and forgotten about tidying them.

"What the hell does he mean?" Hitoshi snarls lowly panic, voice carrying just enough for Izuku to hear. He grabs a fistful of the green-haired teen's sleeve as if to add emphasis to the panic. "He *saw* that? Dude, I *can't* throw. Like, at all!"

"I don't know!" Izuku whispers back, glancing at where Oboro is watching like they're his own personal drama or something. Izuku would love to throw a cushion at him just to wipe the amusement off his face. "He was in the room! I forgot he doesn't know! You could've said something!"

"He was sleeping!" Hitoshi snaps as he stares wide-eyed at the paper ball in his hand. "I thought we'd be safe. I didn't think he'd see. That he'd *know*!"

"You thought he was asleep?" Izuku asks in shock, blinking in surprise as he turns to Hitoshi.

The older boy's face twists into a betrayed grimace, "you *knew* he was awake??"

"I thought you knew!" Izuku defends quickly, "you're his *nephew*! How could you not know? I just wanted to see what would happen!"

"He's *always* asleep!"

“And... what does my state of consciousness have to do with Hitoshi’s sudden throwing expertise?”

The two boys startle, looking between each other before focusing on Shota, who’s finally coming into the room. He deposits his capture weapon and goggles on a side table in the genkan as he comes closer. He stands in the entranceway of the living room, glancing between the two of them as he laces his arms over his chest.

“Nothing!” Izuku blurts out nervously, “um, n-nothing, really, we just... well we’ve been um—”

“Practicing!” Oboro perks up with the offered excuse.

“Practicing!” Izuku repeats instantly with a gasp, shooting his ghostly friend a thankful glance, “um, y-yes, uh, we’ve been practicing. Um. Throwing balls—”

“*Paper balls*,” Hitoshi cuts Izuku off, sounding nervous too, but more put together than the younger boy does, “we’ve been working on throwing *paper* in the dorm and... uh, and his room up here too. And at the apartment. Killing time. Um. When we’re bored. It’s... it’s paper toss. Y’know, tossing paper balls into his uh, the trash bin under his desk—”

“I’m aware of the concept,” Shota cuts him off, looking suspiciously between the two of them.

“R-right! Of course. It’s just. Um. It’s a *whole thing*,” Izuku continues with a sharp nod, “it’s just a lot of fun, so we... play a lot. We’re good, uh, *Hitoshi’s* gotten really good—”

“B-but not *that* good!” the other boy corrects with an inhale, “I’m, uh, I’m *okay* at throwing paper balls. ‘zuku’s been helping me get better since you’ve *seen* how awful I am. Seriously, it was all *luck*. It fluctuates, you know? Some are... good and others—” Hitoshi winces, “—n-not good?”

“You two are sounding *very* suspicious,” Izuku startles at Hizashi’s voice, attention whipping to where the blonde is settling in the doorway between the kitchen area of the apartment and the living room. “What’s this all about anyways?”

“Hitoshi can apparently throw,” Shota offers as an explanation.

Hizashi blinks, looks between the three of them before as frown settles

on his lips. He pushes his glasses up his nose and studies Shota again until: “no he can’t.”

“*Ouch*, uncle ‘zashi,” Hitoshi scoffs. “You wound me.”

“Sorry, Kiddo!” Hizashi backpedals with a placating laugh, “just—you’ve never really been able to, ya’dig? Last time you and Sho played catch you gave *me* a black eye. I wasn’t even playing, and Shota was on the *other side* of the yard.”

“I remember that!” Oboro laughs as he smartly moves to sit on the coffee table instead of the couch. “’toshi cried for *hours*; wouldn’t stop apologizing or even let Hizashi out of his sight. The kid insisted on being held by him and sitting with him. It was like a month until Hitoshi would even *touch* a softball. *Bawled* when his dad took him to try out for Little League; I mean, you’d think the softball murdered his family or something.”

Izuku tries really hard not to react.

He still looks over towards Hitoshi, and the other teen bristles like he knows the ghost had said something. Hitoshi glares lightly at the arm of the couch where the ghost is no longer sitting.

Oboro cackles.

“Don’t remind me,” Hitoshi pouts, “what’s with you two and making me relive my traumatic childhood memories? And in front of *your* kid too. I go to school with him, y’know. How can you two embarrass me more than mom? How is that possible?”

“Re-lax,” Hizashi huffs brightly, swooping into the room to ruffle Hitoshi’s hair, “you were only like six. And you were the absolute sweetest afterwards! Trust me, ‘toshi, we can do *a lot* more damage than this. We could tell Izuku about the time you—”

“Aye!” Hitoshi yelps with a grimace, looking away pointedly, “point taken. Spare me.”

“We’ve gotten off track,” Shota snorts out as he looked between his husband and his nephew. “Back to the startling news that Hitoshi can now throw a paper ball into a trash bin across the room. Three times in a row. Startling considering he could barely throw *straight* the last time he touched a ball. C'mon, don't be shy.”

“N-now?” Hitoshi asks nervously, staring down at the paper ball in his

hand like it'll bite him. He looks desperately to Izuku, who in turn glances desperately at the ghost still watching from the coffee table.

"Would there be a more appropriate time for you?" Shota drawls with a tiny smile, "we don't have all night, Hitoshi, 'zashi made dinner. On with it."

"There's no bin," Hitoshi stalls.

"Well," Shota shrugs from the doorway, gesturing with a flap of his hand in the direction of the loveseat. "Aim for that box over there. Let's see this throw you amazed my entire class with. I'm on the edge of my seat."

The box in question was an old jelly pouch box that Blanket had grown oddly attached to. It was hidden away between the entertainment stand and the loveseat couch. It was kept simply because the cat liked to hide in the depth of it and pop up like a vicious *jack-in-the-box* trying to snag fingers and loose clothing.

Hizashi is watching from the kitchen doorway, and Shota has now stepped into the room.

Izuku has never seen Hitoshi look more nervous. He's never felt more nervous about a ball of paper. He turns his head slightly to look at the ghost subtly.

"Didn't I tell you he was on his own?" Oboro sighs dramatically— far too dramatic for someone who's idea that paper toss scheme was. Izuku shoots the ghost an annoyed scowl, which might perfectly convey his unsaid words as the ghost sighs again, this time defeated. "Okay, fine, *one* more time. I guess this was sorta my fault, even if it was super cool."

Oboro uncrosses his legs and pushes himself up.

Izuku watches out of the corner of his eye as Oboro brushes his fingertips through Hitoshi's wrist before pinching the paper ball again and giving it a tiny tug to announce his presence. Izuku feels Hitoshi startle at his side, but the older teen relaxes just a quick. He looks towards Izuku for guidance, even as Shota and Hizashi wait silently, probably watching them intently.

"Okay," Oboro lulls his attention to Izuku, "listen, get him to toss it twice. It'll go in the first: *proof* and miss the second: *low expectations returned*. Good as new."

Izuku knows his nose crinkles in offense for Hitoshi's sake, but he gives a little nod anyways. The ghost is quite literally saving their asses right now.

"There's no harm in trying," Izuku offers casually. Or he attempts at casually but knows his voice has raised an octave due to nervousness. "Um... right?"

"Yeah," Hitoshi gives a slow nod, eyes flicking between Shota, Hizashi, Izuku and the empty spot in front of him where he can no doubt feel the chill of a ghost. "It may go in, or... or not?"

"Are you two alright?" Hizashi asks slowly, arching a worried eyebrow. "You're acting a little weird."

"Yes!" Izuku blurts, "um, of course. We're fine. Hitoshi, uh, throw the ball."

"Right," Hitoshi sucks in a breath before angling his arm back and throwing the ball.

Oboro carries the ball to the box, batting it in when he's close enough. He turns back to Izuku with a squinty-eyed grin, "now come pick it up and get him to throw it again. I won't help."

"Nice one," Izuku cheers awkwardly as he pushes himself up to do as directed.

Hizashi looks completely surprised, blinking at the box like he can't believe he just witnessed it go in, while Shota is staring at Hitoshi with a calculating look. Hitoshi has managed to rein in his own surprise, which Izuku knows Shota would've noticed instantly.

"Woah, 'toshi, that was amazing!" Hizashi glances back at the teen still on the couch. He sounds impressed, and a bit in disbelief. "I didn't believe you, but that was a good throw!"

"How did you do that?" Shota asks as he steps closer to the couch, "you can't throw."

"What is this, gang up on Hitoshi day?" the purple-haired teen sneers as he glares back at his uncle. "You saw it uncle Sho, I very much *can* throw. Um, occasionally. I still suck though. Mostly—uh, m-most of the time, I mean."

"You can't throw," Shota repeats, eyes narrowed on the teen.

“Um, whaddya say, ‘toshi, one more time?” Izuku suggests, tossing the ball into the air and catching it as a means to distract himself. “Your streak is three, um, from class—b-but I’ve only seen you do that once.”

“Rightt,” Hitoshi repeats, dragging the word out as he glares lightly at Izuku for suggesting he do it again. Still, he accepts the paper ball that the other teen had fished out of the box and tossed back. “It probably won’t go in...”

Hitoshi throws the ball again, and this time Oboro doesn’t touch it at all. The ball does make it... well, almost to the box. And by almost, Izuku means it somehow ends up under the television stand. Hitoshi squawks in embarrassment, shooting Izuku a betrayed look that the green-haired teen can just shrug apologetically.

Oboro tells Izuku solemnly, “Hitoshi is once again awful at sports.”

“That, uh, was a good try, Listener,” Hizashi offers from the doorway, “you were close?”

“I overshot it completely,” Hitoshi groans in reply, flopping back into the couch in embarrassment, “my luck is gone. I had a *streak* going. I blame you entirely, uncle Sho.”

“I still don’t understand how you managed to do that four times if you have no athleticism,” Shota deadpans, narrowed eyes hardening on Hitoshi. “How?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Hitoshi offers sarcastically, still pouting. “Now are you guys gonna feed me before dorm curfew? Hizashi promised tempura.”

“Right!” Hizashi yelps, “it’s all ready! C’mon, family, everyone into the kitchen before it gets even colder—you too, Sho, stop glowering at your nephew! It was a lucky shot, or something.” Hizashi herds them all along, poking his tongue out when Shota turns his glare onto him. “Also, ‘toshi, no pouting at the dinner table, house rules!”

“Order has been restored,” Oboro teases as he trails in behind everyone.

Izuku rolls his eyes fondly as he plops down into his chair.

The internship portion of the semester arrives faster than Izuku ever imagines. It feels like he goes to sleep one night, and in the morning,

they're suddenly applying for internships and going to Agencies for interviews.

It's stressful, even with an emotional support ghost at his side.

Izuku's excited for the chance to intern at Nighteye Agency, under Sir Nighteye. When Togata-Senpai suggests it, Izuku is thrilled. It seems like such a perfect fit for him, and it's even better that he has Togata-Senpai helping him along.

He goes into the interview bright-eyed and excited—

And he leaves close to tears.

"That guy," Oboro hisses, throwing a hand back in the direction of Sir Nighteye's office, "is an asshole! What the hell kind of bullshit interview was that? It's like he *wanted* you to fail— he was talkin' shit about you to you. Why is *Togata* any better of a candidate— no, actually, not even a candidate because it's *not* a competition when you've *already* been picked by All Might himself—"

Izuku tunes the ghost out as he throws a wave and a shaky half-smile over his shoulder back at a waving Togata-Senpai. He feels bad about fleeing, but he doesn't know what else to do.

It feels like he's gonna start crying, and he doesn't want to do that in front of his upperclassman, not that his thinks Togata-Senpai would ever hold it against him or anything.

He just... he needs to get out of here. Out of the building.

Maybe then he'd be able to calm the raging of his heart, and the festering *desperation* in his chest. He'd been so close to failing. He had failed. He scraped through by the skin of his teeth, and he doesn't even know what swayed Sir Nighteye when it wasn't his potential.

"—he's just being a jerk! He's throwing a *tantrum*! That Pro in there is just so *entitled*. Figures All Might's only Sidekick would be so full of himself!" Izuku chances a quick glance at where Oboro is keeping pace at his side, still ranting in genuine anger, "God, All Might makes a decision about his super Quirk without consulting him, who he hasn't even Sidekicked for for literal *years* and the guy takes it out on you. *Bull. Shit.*"

"It's not Togata-Senpai's fault— I don't think he even knows about my Quirk," Izuku swallows down the anxiety in his chest, defending the

older student because it really has nothing to do with him, even if Sir Nighteye was insistent Togata was better suited to inherit One for All. “You can’t be mad at my Senpai for what Sir said. Sir Nighteye likes Togata, that doesn’t mean he has to like me too. I just don’t… I don’t really understand what I did wrong…”

“I’m not mad at Togata!” Oboro snaps, and yeah, he’s *pissed*. “I’m mad at him! And you didn’t do *anything* wrong, Izuku; nothing, got it? He’s just a salty Pro Hero who thinks he knows best about stuff he has no business being a part of! It’s not like he was All Might’s predecessor or anything, he was a *Sidekick*.”

Oboro gestures wildly to the doorway at the other side of the room that they’re quickly walking away from once again as he speaks, nose crinkled in a snarl.

It’s been a while since Izuku seen the ghost this upset.

The ghost is still fuming, walking briskly at Izuku’s side as the teen heads towards the Agency’s reception area, intent on leaving the building as fast as he can.

He’d planned on catching the subway back to Yuuei with Togata-Senpai when the day was finished, but after his meeting with Sir Nighteye, despite the desired results of actually getting an internship against all odds, he hadn’t really wanted to face his upperclassman and hang around.

He knows Togata-Senpai won’t say anything about what happened in the interview, if just to spare Izuku’s feelings and pride. He’s far too kind to stoop to gossiping about private affairs that happen outside the school.

Izuku knows that interview hadn’t gone well. At all. Anyone could see that.

The older teen had been excited to bring Izuku in to meet Sir Nighteye and was excited to show him the ropes and work with him if he’d managed to impress Sir and snag the internship position.

Izuku was just as excited walking into this, honestly.

He’d liked Togata-Senpai instantly, as soon as his class had met the three third-years at Shota’s insistence.

And seeing Togata-Senpai in action that day; using his Quirk and

being so kind and supportive and enthusiastic (and so very naked) while also easily avoiding them and all their attacks at once had been amazing. How he'd single handedly taken out Izuku's entire class in just minutes.

The third-year just had a way about him; kind and encouraging even as he wreaked havoc on them easily. Smiling the entire time, but in a friendly way and not a condescending sort.

A destined Hero.

Izuku had heard nothing but good things about Yuuei's current 'Big Three', and Togata-Senpai really had exceeded Izuku's expectations, which is why he'd instantly jumped on the offer of an internship at the Agency the upperclassman worked for. Sir Nighteye's Agency. All Might's one and only Sidekick ever.

The internship had honestly sounded *perfect*.

He'd always looked up to Sir Nighteye as well. He'd been All Might's Sidekick after all— that made the man ten times cooler then Izuku had already thought him to be. Not to mention his amazing Quirk, which was super *rare*.

Now though... he feels a little sick as he flees out of the Agency.

Sir Nighteye wasn't what Izuku had expected, and he really wasn't what Togata-Senpai had built the Pro up to be. Not to Izuku, at least.

He's not sure if he's embarrassed at how things ended up, ashamed that he hadn't really won his place in the internship program, or if he was just genuinely scared of what the Pro had said to him. Scared that he'd been spouting the *truth*.

Whatever he was feeling, it was bad enough that he knew he needed to get out before he started crying. Something tells him that would only give Sir Nighteye more ammunition on why Togata was a better Hero. Izuku's not sure he'd be able to handle that— Togata Senpai *is* a good Hero.

He *knows* that.

Izuku's glad to suck in a breath of fresh air as he steps out of the Agency doors.

He's so glad he doesn't have to stay, even though he was initially

planning to if he did manage to impress Sir Nighteye and get the internship.

He simply can't be there anymore— not right now. Not after *that*.

Izuku thinks Togata-Senpai understands that. The older student had seen how *awfully* the interview had been going, no matter how hard Izuku tried to impress the Pro. Izuku knows the older boy had been worried as the interview progressed that Izuku really wouldn't have gotten the internship.

Maybe that's why Togata-Senpai hadn't so much as batted an eyelash when Izuku had stuttered his way through explaining that he was going to catch the next train back to school instead of sticking around like they'd planned. He'd simply smiled in encouragement and patted Izuku on the shoulder.

Togata-Senpai still has his afternoon of interning, so he can't join Izuku even if he wanted to. Izuku thinks his older friend had been a bit hesitant about letting him go on his own, and that he couldn't accompany him back to school.

Maybe Izuku looks more wrecked by the outcome of this interview than he thought he did.

Still, despite the hesitance in Togata-Senpai's eyes, Izuku knows the older teen has responsibilities at the Agency already. It would be a waste of time bringing Izuku back to Yuuei, not to mention a distraction from his internship duties and the upcoming patrol Senpai had been telling Izuku about on the train ride into town.

And he'd never want to distract the older boy at all. Sir Nighteye already doesn't like him, what would he think if Izuku was being a distraction to his model intern? Would Sir Nighteye take back the internship approval?

Izuku can't risk that— he'd hardly gotten the approval in the first place.

There really isn't anything keeping him at the Agency right now. It's not like he can really do anything without the paperwork being completed, which also needs his homeroom teacher's signature, and he doesn't even have his Hero costume.

The internship paperwork doesn't need to be filled out at the Agency and Bubble Girl hadn't minded putting together the necessary

paperwork from him to bring back to school, plus he knows between Shota, Hizashi and the public transportation system Musutafu has, he'll find some way to deliver the completed paperwork— preferably when he's not mourning the Pro's haunting words.

"I mean," Oboro's voice brings him out of his thoughts, and it's then he realizes the ghost had been talking the entire time, no less annoyed then when Izuku had left the office, "he doesn't get *any* say in who One for All is passed down to— the Quirk's never even touched his stupid *all-seeing* eyes. It's bullshit, Izuku, he's being an asshole because he doesn't agree with All Might's decision. One for All shouldn't be affecting your internship in the slightest, but it clearly— *clearly* is. That's not right."

Izuku knows all this, logically, but that doesn't mean the obvious rejection despite his new internship doesn't fill his chest with dread. Sir Nighteye had been ruthless in what he said and the interview.

When those three minutes were up, Izuku had thought he'd lost. That he'd *failed*. He hadn't known how he was going to tell his guardians, or classmates, or *All Might* himself.

"You know he's wrong, right?" Oboro's voice drags Izuku from his thoughts.

He's surprised to find them outside the Agency now, lingering around the side of the building. He doesn't know when he stopped walking, but he takes the knowledge in stride as he leans back against the rough siding of the building.

The ghost looks worried, lip caught between his teeth as he studies Izuku, "you can't let someone like him get to you, 'zuku. Just because he can *glimpse* into the future doesn't mean he knows *anything* about you, or what you're doing with the Quirk. It was a rigged test; you had *three minutes* to prove yourself capable when he already knew everything you'd do for an entire *hour*. You can't honestly think that's a fair test. You're an amazing Hero, and you're doing wonders with it. All Might *picked* you for a reason. He picked *you*— not Togata."

Izuku nods slowly, even if he doesn't completely believe that.

All Might had chosen him, but was he the right pick? There's no question that Togata-Senpai wouldn't be able to do amazing things with One for All and his permeation Quirk together.

What did Izuku bring to the table?

“Hey,” the ghost sighs, and Izuku feels the ghost lightly slap his cheek to get his attention, and then the ghost lightly pinches Izuku’s chin between his thumb and finger, angling his drifting attention back towards Oboro’s own face, “stop doubting. You’re being *painfully* obvious; I know that’s *exactly* what’s going on in that head of yours. This is what he wants, ‘zuku, he wants you questioning yourself. He wants you *doubting* yourself.”

“I’m not,” Izuku scoffs, eyes still drifting away from the ghost, “why’re you touching me? What happened to consent and not using the Quirk in public?”

“Eyes here, man,” Oboro huffs as moves his hands to catch Izuku’s cheeks in his hands. He taps his finger twice against Izuku’s cheek. Izuku looks back with a huff, eyes narrowed on the annoyed pout on the ghost’s face. “The more you look away the more annoying I’ll get; and I couldn’t think of any other way to get your attention. It’s fine, I’m solid. And I have *some* control of my Quirk, give me some credit, yeah?”

Izuku blows out a huff of a laugh as the ghost continues, squishing his cheeks together between his palms, “now, why are you letting Sir Nighteye get to you when *All Might*’s the one who gave you the Quirk? Don’t’cha think the one who *possesses* the Quirk would be the best suited to decide the *successor*?”

“I’m not letting him get to me,” Izuku repeats with a sigh, wrapping a hand around Oboro’s wrist to pry one of his hands off his face. The ghost’s other hand drops on autopilot. “I’m trying to be realistic. He’s not wrong; Togata-Senpai is going to be an amazing Hero as is, but imagine what he could be with this Quirk?”

“You seriously need to cut it out. *Imagining* different outcomes is a dangerous thing, ‘zuku, especially in Heroics,” Oboro shakes his head, arms dropping to his sides. “What’s happened, happened. All Might chose you. That’s the end of it, no matter what Sir Nighteye thinks. All Might believes in *you*. He could’ve given this Quirk to anyone—literally *anyone* in the *entire world*. And he still picked you when Togata was already an option.”

“You can’t tell me he wouldn’t make a good successor.”

“No, he would,” Oboro agrees lightly, “I’m sure any of the students at Yuuei would’ve made fine successors, but what about what you’ve done with the Quirk so far? *You* can’t tell *me* you’re not an *amazing*

successor. You are. The thing is, Izu, you had something All Might was looking for even when you didn't have a Quirk. There's a reason he chose you, even when he had a school of Heroic hopefuls and other Pros to choose from."

Izuku looks away deliberately.

Oboro... has a point.

All Might had been on his side since the Sludge Villain attack. He'd put the work and effort into helping Izuku build up his muscles so he could actually possess the Quirk without dying.

He could've picked anyone but... he picked the person he knew needed so much work. He picked Izuku knowing that he was physically week and couldn't even handle the Quirk being passed on to him without blowing up.

There was a reason he chose to put in so much extra effort with Izuku instead of picking a Yuuei third year or another Pro ready to accept the Quirk should it have been offered.

"You know I'm right," Oboro says lightly as he leans against the side of the building just as Izuku is. "I mean, even the vestiges are on your side, right? They've accepted you too. They're not sayin' anything negative about what you've managed to do with the Quirk, now are they?"

There's agreeing whispers in the back of his head. It's a cluttered agreement, all the vestiges pushing their agreement and praise into his mind, but nothing really stands out. It still makes him smile, there's something about them that just feels *right*.

"Sir Nighteye isn't completely wrong," Izuku shakes his head, once again. It's the truth no matter how much it hurts to say. "None of us can deny that."

"Yeah, well, he also has no say when it comes to a Quirk that's not *his*, so that's a moot point." Oboro snorts a laugh, "just because he's privy to the secret, doesn't mean he's the keeper of it. Like Gran Torino, he also knows— has known longer than Sir Nighteye if he mentored All Might too, probably, and you don't see him trying to make any decisions about the Quirk. He's just been trying to help you; y'know, like any sane Pro who knows the secret would."

"Sir Nighteye is sane," Izuku snorts out, finally letting some of the

tension ease from his body. He still doesn't feel great; anxiety through the roof as he tries not to think about that interview, but his friend can be very convincing when he wants to be. Oboro is making good points. “He’s just... careful. And he doesn’t have to like me. I was the one who failed the first test, remember? I offended him.”

“Yeah, well,” Oboro huffs dejectedly, “he also can’t just not like you because he’s unhappy with All Might. That’s not fair, ‘zuku. *And* that’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever seen in an interview. Making him *laugh*? Your internship relied on your ability to be funny. And when you couldn’t impress him with that, he gave you a Quirk-rigged test that he had no intention of letting you pass.”

“So he’s a little strange,” Izuku relents with a shake of his head, finally pushing off the wall. “He’s still a good Pro, probably a good mentor too. We don’t know, I mean, Togata-Senpai is *flourishing* under him, right? He could probably handle One for All.”

“More like he’s grooming the guy to take a powerful Quirk that’s haunted by seven dead people that he doesn’t even know exists. Not to mention that Quirk is also *not* even up for grabs considering it’s *already* been passed down.”

“Hey,” Izuku huffs, “y’know All Might did the same thing with me. It’s not like he could’ve just handed the Quirk over— I very much like my limbs. There’s nothing wrong with preparing someone for a Quirk like that; and it’s not *grooming*. It's *training*, Oboro.”

“I’m aware,” Oboro replies drily, lulling his head in Izuku direction. “Doesn’t really make it right, ‘zuku."

“I don’t think we have any say of what’s right and wrong when it comes to this,” Izuku shakes his head. The teen narrows his eyes challengingly at the ghost, “you saw what All for One can do. He’s dangerous. The less people to know, the better. Plus, what do you think would’ve happened if he knew All Might was training me to inherit the Quirk? *Before* I had it, when I was still a Quirkless nobody?”

“Okay, okay,” Oboro sighs, waving a dismissive hand, “fine. I get it. Secrecy is key when it comes to the highly dangerous, overly powerful Quirk that was thrust into your innocent little hands. Even though things weren’t *exactly* done right, or *morally*, that’s how they needed to be done for everyone’s safety. Still, that doesn’t mean I have to like it; just like I don’t have to like Sir Nighteye being an absolute asshole

in that office."

Izuku tucks his hands into the pockets of his slacks, finally stepping away from the side of the building. "You're still mad about that one, huh?"

"It happened literally *five minutes ago*," Oboro snaps lightly, "I am definitely *still* mad about that one. There's just no reason for him to act like that. He's an adult. A *Pro*. You should tell Shota, he'll definitely agree with me."

"I'm not going to tell Shota," Izuku shakes his head, "what would I even say? Sir Nighteye was being discriminatory towards me because *I'm not Togata* and he doesn't approve of me? He doesn't think I'll make as good of a Symbol of Peace as Togata would? Shota would have no idea what to do with that. *I* don't know what to do with that."

"You could tell him *why* Sir Nighteye's upset," Oboro reminds easily as Izuku finally steps away from the side of the building and onto the street. "He'll want to know, 'zuku. Sir Nighteye can't treat you like something lesser than Togata because he's mad he didn't get his way."

It's busy with foot traffic, and Izuku doesn't want to be stared at for talking to nothing, so he shuffles his phone from his pocket and holds it to his ear as if on a call, eyes narrowing on the ghost who trails after him.

It really is a familiar road of conversation, one Oboro never seems to give up on.

Oboro slows at Izuku's side so they're keeping pace, the ghost not even caring that he's phasing through people as Izuku weaves through the crowd.

Izuku huffs out a sigh as anyone who Oboro touches shivers like a gust of cold breeze washed over them, some even glancing back like they'll spot the random *coldness*.

"I can't," Izuku says quietly. "You know *why* I can't. And it's all the more real now. We've seen how dangerous he is. I don't want to get anyone else involved; especially not my guardians. I signed up for this, not them."

"They signed up for *you* though. All of you; One for All included. It's a part of you. And you know they wouldn't want you shouldering this alone," Oboro hurries his pace so he can stop and look back at Izuku

as the teen continues steadily, “I just think you should think about it. Ask All Might about telling Sho and ‘zashi. It’s not like they’re random foster parents, they’re *Pro Heroes* too, and your teachers.”

Maybe it is something he should think about.

The longer he has One for All, the more people he’s noticed know about the Quirk.

For such a big secret, Yagi-San has a lot of people who know. He doesn’t doubt they needed to know for some reason or another, but it’s still a lot of people considering the depth and confidentiality of the secret.

Recovery Girl knows, Nezu-Sensei knows. Gran Torino. Detective Tsukauchi. Sir Nighteye.

There are probably others too, people Izuku hasn’t met yet— and the only person Izuku’s told is Kacchan, who still doesn’t completely believe in the stockpiling transferable Quirk.

And Oboro, but he hardly counts.

All Might has been a good mentor, and he can’t deny that, but Shota has also been key when it comes to how he’s learned and grown into the Quirk. He’s helped Izuku a lot, and he doesn’t even really know *what* he’s helping with. Would it be different if he know what he was working with?

Shota is his homeroom teacher; of course he’d be the one bestowing the most wisdom and helping Izuku along when it comes to fight style and Quirk control. He’s seen the most of Izuku’s trial and error, his ups and downs; sees where Izuku needs work, or where he relies too much on something.

All Might is helpful, knows the Quirk and offers good advice, but they’re also very different people. All Might took to the Quirk like a duck to water. Izuku’s *struggled* with it. He can’t help Izuku in the way he really needs because All Might never struggled like Izuku has.

It’s hard to teach something that came naturally to you.

It’s even harder training someone to use a Quirk that acts differently to each wielder.

Would things be different if there were other people he could talk to?

Other teachers who could help him? It is a big secret, but he thinks his guardians are capable. And if All for One is working with Shigaraki, shouldn't Shota at least know? Shigaraki's been targeting 1-A since the first couple weeks of school; they could be more prepared.

Maybe... it is worth talking to All Might about?

"I'm going to take the thoughtful silence as a solid *maybe* on the talking to your guardians about your acquired overpowered stockpiling transferable super Quirk scale," Oboro's voice startles him from his thoughts.

Izuku takes a second to mull over the ghost's words before he gives a slow nod.

"Maybe," he agrees cautiously, looking away when the ghost grins victoriously. He doesn't want the ghost to get too excited, he still needs to think about this and run it by All Might before he makes any decisions. "Don't get too excited, this is a big decision."

"Hey, a maybe is better than the blatant refusal when I first mentioned talking to them," the ghost lifts his hands as if to surrender, shrugging his shoulders as he does so. "I just think they'll help, and it can't hurt to have someone to really talk to, y'know?"

"That would be nice," Izuku agrees lightly. "I'll think about it."

"I'm going to count this as a win," Oboro puffs his chest out with that squinty-eyed grin. "Now, where're we going? The train station was in the other direction."

"Oh," Izuku breathes out as he pauses. He doesn't stay still long as someone bumps into his shoulder as they try to pass, and it gets him moving again so he's not in the way. He pulls his phone from his ear long enough to glance at the time, only to frown. "I've... already missed the train back to Yuuei. The next one won't be until this afternoon. I don't know what to do now."

He hasn't spent a lot of time in this part of town and had planned on sticking close to Togata-Senpai since he knows what he's doing. He'll need to familiarize himself with the district for patrol purposes.

"If you wanna kill some time, I know a great café!" Izuku glances sideways at the ghost, eyebrow cocking in question. Oboro glances over, smiling sheepishly as he adds, "I used to live around here."

“You did?” Izuku can’t help but ask, head cocking in interest.

He still doesn’t know a lot about the ghost— and he doesn’t ask many questions anymore. Not that he’s not curious, he’s just found it’s safer to let the ghost come to him instead of chasing answers. It’s not like Oboro keeps things a secret, he’s more than happy to share information and tidbits about himself when the occasion arises.

“We all loved this café,” Oboro chirps, stepping ahead of Izuku by one single step so he can lead the way. “Sho and ‘zashi used to sleepover at my house a lot, and in the morning, we’d wake up *super* early to stop by for coffee and pastries. Usually on our way to school. I’m still sure it’s the only reason Shota ever agreed to sleepover with us— that *bribe* of fresh coffee in the morning— and it’s *also* the only thing we could get him up with. Teen Shota really liked his sleep.”

“Adult Shota also really likes his sleep,” Izuku laughs lightly, arranging his hold on his phone as he walks. “I can’t wait. There are so many nice cafés around.”

Oboro chatters on about his favorite pastries the little café has to offer, and his favorite selections of drinks. That quickly transitions to Shota and Hizashi’s go-to orders that Oboro recited by heart.

Oboro’s telling Izuku about the time Shota ordered a latte with five shots of espresso when they finally approached a small corner shop café. He glances in the window as he walks by it; it’s not incredibly busy considering the time of day.

“I swear,” Oboro snorts a chuckle into his fist, “Shota didn’t sleep for like two full nights. He was so cranky. He snapped at everything and everyone. Not the greatest partner for Heroics, lemme tell ya. It definitely scarred him for life; I mean, I’ve never seen the guy have espresso since— oh, hey, we’re here! Look! It hasn’t changed!”

Oboro bounds towards the door like an excited puppy, staring up in awe.

The ghost pauses outside the door, expression wavering as he drops his gaze to stare into the glass door, “you know, my mom used to bring me here when I was little... she did it with all of us; only ever one at a time though. It was like the only time where one of us got mom’s entire attention. One on one, you know? That’s just how it is when you’re one of half a dozen kids.”

Oboro looks back at Izuku, blinking away the reminiscent sheen to his

gaze. The ghost lets out a laugh, rubbing the back of his neck, “that’s probably why I loved coming here with Sho and ‘zashi too. It’s nice to share something like that with them and *now* I get to share it with you too! C’mon! They have an amazing caramel latte! You’ll love it!”

“I can’t wait to try it,” Izuku smiles, “you’ll have to suggest your favorites.”

“Ooh, definitely! I have so many things in mind for you to try. The latte for sure, it was always my favorite. But you’ve gotta ask for cinnamon in it!”

“Cinnamon?” Izuku blinks as he finally reaches to pull the door open, “really?”

“Trust me,” the ghost nods, “it’s odd, but so good. Gotta get whipped cream too. You definitely deserve the works after the emotional rollercoaster that was that dumb internship interview.”

“It wasn’t that bad,” Izuku mutters under his breath as he steps into the café.

The scent of fresh coffee hits him in the best way, and he’s reminded of the small little café in his neighborhood he’d worked at. He should stop by and see how everyone is. Maybe even bring them a gift basket to thank them for their kindness now that he’s finally starting to straighten himself out.

This café is bigger than the one he’d worked at; more tables and there’s even a small row of booths pushed against the far wall. There’s also two cash registers, so he doesn’t doubt this place gets busy.

There’s an empty booth towards the back corner that’ll be perfect for Izuku and his not so visible company. The less he looks like a weirdo talking to himself, the better.

The teen slips his phone into his pocket. It’s a bit rude to be talking to someone else while pretending to be on the phone. His mother wasn’t around a lot, but basic manners and etiquette was something she always insisted on. If he couldn’t be *normal*, he could at least be a *gentleman*.

“You say that,” the ghost huffs with a frown, “but you didn’t see the look on your face.”

That’s fair, Izuku decides silently as he waits in line.

When he makes it to the counter, Oboro coaches him through ordering the perfect drink and the best snack. The caramel latte with cinnamon mixed into the coffee before the steamed milk is added, then topped with whipped cream and drizzled with caramel sauce. He also asks for a chocolate croissant.

He's never in his life ordered anything so intricate, so he literally repeats after Oboro word for word to make sure it's done right. The ghost looks thrilled as Izuku moves back to the booth in the far corner when the barista tells him she'll bring it right over, setting his backpack beside him as he watches the ghost phase through the counter so he can watch them make the drink.

Izuku slips his phone from his pocket, surprised to see a text. He hadn't even realized it vibrated. He wonders if he's been walking around pretending to be on the phone with the unread messages pressed against his cheek.

It wouldn't surprise him, honestly.

Shota 12:46 PM

Hey, where are you?

Togata sent a message saying you were on your way back to school. He seemed worried. I thought you were catching the later train with him this afternoon.

You okay, Problem Child?

Shota 12:50 PM

If you made the train he said you'd be on, you should've arrived back at school by now.

Izuku?

Izuku frowns at the texts, wondering when Togata-Senpai would've texted Shota.

He also wonders why Togata has Shota's number. Or maybe he used the school messaging system. That's the only contact all his classmates have to reach Shota, which had been introduced when everyone moved into the dorms. Izuku thinks he and Hitoshi are the only ones with Shota's real phone number.

It's not really surprising.

Shota probably would've asked the older boy to keep an eye on him. Honestly, with the way the League has been catching them off guard constantly, it's probably best none of the students be alone outside of school bounds. 1-A especially.

Still, he's not technically where he's supposed to be. As far as Shota is aware, Izuku should've been at the Agency all afternoon. He wonders if he'll be in trouble for this? He doesn't know what else he could've done though.

Izuku 1:17 PM

Sorry!

I missed that train.

The next one doesn't leave until 4, so I'm waiting in a coffee shop by Nighteye Agency.

I didn't mean to worry anyone.

Izuku hesitates, looking over at where the ghost is all but drooling as the barista tops his latte off with whipped cream and caramel sauce.

Izuku 1:18 PM

Didn't know what else to do.

I know this wasn't a trip into the city for fun. I got distracted.

I can make up the time I waste here.

Am I in trouble?

Izuku bites his lip as he waits for a response.

The barista comes with a bouncy Oboro trailing after her. The ghost plops into the seat across from Izuku as the woman sets his drink and croissant down.

"Thank you," he manages a weak smile before she turns and heads back to the counter, leaving him with his drink and his ghost.

"I was only gone for like two minutes," Oboro's grin falls to light frown when he takes in Izuku's expression, "what happened?"

His phone buzzes before he can say anything in reply, and then Oboro is phasing through the table to settle at his side, reading over his shoulder.

Shota 1:20 PM

You're not in trouble.

Missing the train was an accident. That's okay.

It happens, don't worry about it.

Izuku watches those three little dots on the bottom of their messages as Shota types, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth as he waits.

"You thought you were in trouble?" Oboro asks quietly, eyes scanning over the texts. "This isn't your fault, 'zuku."

"No," Izuku blows out quietly, "well... I don't know. I'm not where I'm supposed to be. I could've stuck around at the Agency and worked on my paperwork like we'd planned or made it to the station faster, so I didn't miss the train. Instead, I'm just sitting here drinking coffee while trying to kill the four hours until the next train."

"You *missed* the train," Oboro reminds bluntly, "even if we'd made it to the station right after you left the Agency, I doubt you would've made the twelve o'clock train. I don't know what you expect Shota to expect from you, but he's not gonna blame you for things out of your control. At least you're not just sitting in the station for four hours."

His phone buzzes in his hands, so he looks down, entirely too aware of Oboro doing the same.

Shota 1:22 PM

I was just making sure you were alright. We hadn't heard from you, and you weren't with Togata at the Agency. No harm done. Killing time in a coffee shop is logical, there's nothing you need to make up so long as all your internship paperwork is finished by the deadline.

You could've called Hizashi or I to come pick you up. We would've.

Izuku can't help the small smile the lifts onto his lips as he rereads the words.

Izuku 1:24 PM

You're both busy.

Hitoshi said you and he were working with the capture weapon today, and Hizashi is at the radio station, isn't he? I didn't want to bother you guys. I don't mind waiting.

"Nawhhh," Oboro coos, "*Dadzawa* is such a good look on him. He's such a sweetheart under all that stern, tired personality!"

"I'm sorry," Izuku promptly chokes on his own tongue, "*dad-what?*"

"What?" Oboro turns to Izuku, grin edging towards mischievous, "don't like it? Dadzawa and YamaDad. I think it suits them both perfectly. Captures their *dad-esque* qualities. Tell me I'm wrong, 'zuku."

"Why are you like this?" Izuku whispers chagrined.

"It's fun," Oboro offers with a hearty laugh, "I know you don't like to stray too far from the *normal* path— for obvious reasons— but I think it's fun to be different. Then again, I'm also a ghost, so, y'know; I can be as weird as I want and not have to worry about how humanity will perceive me. Just how *you* perceive me, but you already know I'm weird and you like me anyways!"

"Unfortunately," Izuku teases lightly. He finally lifts his drink to his lips, hoping it's cooled long enough that he doesn't burn his tongue. It's still really hot, but not scalding how.

It tastes... different. Good different, he thinks.

The cinnamon isn't bad in the caramel by any means, but it's not flavors he'd think would go together. Cinnamon isn't exactly a popular spice here, so he doesn't really know what to expect.

The sweet of the caramel with the warm and woody sort of flavor the cinnamon has. It's balanced nicely with the coffee, which Izuku doesn't drink often, and the whipped cream ties it all together.

"Good huh?" Oboro asks with a wide smile, leaning on his fist on the table. "I kept telling people it was oddly good, but no one trusted me enough to actually try it. Well, except 'zashi. I don't think he was a fan, which was fair. I love him, but I guess we can't *all* have sophisticated tastebuds."

Izuku snorts a surprised laugh into his next sip of his latte.

He winces as whipped cream and latte foam spatters up onto his nose and top lip. It only slightly burns.

“I really wanna hit you right now,” Izuku murmurs with a small smile to show he’s just kidding. He grabs a napkin to wipe at his face, glancing around to make sure no one had seen him exhale into his drink. “If I drown in this latte, I’ll haunt you.”

“Not sure that threat has the same impact on a ghost as it would an alive person,” Oboro chuckles, with a wide, toothy smile. “But it would be a *talent* to drown in a latte though.”

Izuku sighs heavily taking another sip.

He opens his mouth to respond, but his phone buzzing on the table has him snapping his mouth shut. He carefully sets his mug down, glancing at the texts. More from Shota.

It’s simply a question of which café he’s at— there's apparently two by Nighteye Agency. Izuku glances at Oboro, who tells him the address of the café like he knows it by heart, and Izuku responds to the text with the name of the street the café’s on.

He doesn’t get anything more back besides a simple ‘Ok.’.

Izuku frowns down at the texts, before shaking off his thoughts. Probably for security measures. Kowing everyone’s locations while they’re outside of school grounds.

“He’s such a dad,” Oboro comments as he reads over Izuku’s shoulder, fondness spreading over his features. “He’s also up to something, just so you know.”

“He’s just checking in,” Izuku huffs, “he’s my teacher; of course he’d want to know where I am.”

“He’s your *dad*,” Oboro deadpans playfully. The ghost flops his upper body across the table, trailing his finger boredly through the napkin dispenser. It doesn’t move at all, thankfully. “Oh, right, *guardian*. My apologies, I know the *‘d’ word* freaks you out.”

“It does not freak me out,” Izuku defends with a scowl, “I’m just their foster kid.”

“You’re their kid, not just their *foster* kid,” Oboro corrects easily. “You’re *their* kid, and they’re *your* dads. And *I’m* the fun uncle. A happy lil’ dysfunctional family.”

Izuku startles, whipping around to the ghost, “what?”

“Yeah, if you think about it,” Oboro leans into Izuku’s space, “I was their best friend, so if they had a kid, and I was still alive, there’s no question that I wouldn’t be ‘uncle Oboro’. *Cool* uncle Oboro, because there’s no way I’m not the ‘cool’ uncle. I’d be the greatest uncle. If Nem gets to be your aunt; I get to be an uncle. That’s the rules. So, uh, yeah. You’re technically my nephew, just sayin’.”

“That makes me incredibly uncomfortable,” Izuku snorts in amusement as he lifts the chocolate croissant to his lips. “We’re friends.”

“That’s just how cool of an uncle I am.”

Izuku bows his head in exasperation, “I hate you.”

“No, you don’t, Nephew!” Oboro is laughing loudly, and Izuku can’t help but smile. He really loves when the ghost is being his natural self; laughing and grinning and teasing. Oboro deserves it. “You *adore* me, and I know it! Why else would you keep me around, eh?”

Izuku lets out a light laugh as he sips at his latte.

They settle into comfortable conversation as Izuku sips at his latte and eats the chocolate croissant. Oboro leans over whenever Izuku picks his mug up to smell the hot drink, halfheartedly complaining that he shouldn’t have introduced Izuku to his favorite because it’s torture to constantly smell it but not be able to have any.

He’s not sure how long they stay hidden away in the corner of the café, just enjoying each other's company as they try to pass the time.

“Hey, Kiddo!” Izuku looks up at the sound of a very familiar voice.

Hizashi is strolling towards the booth. He’s in his civilian clothes, red frame glasses and hair tied up in a neat French braid. The blonde offers a toothy grin and a wave when he catches Izuku’s eye.

Oboro doesn’t look too surprised to see Hizashi. He stifles a grin and leans closer to Izuku, “overprotective *Dadzawa* strikes again. I told you so, he was totally up to something.”

Izuku can just hope his nose doesn't scrunch up as he refrains from turning to shove the ghost away.

"'zashi?" Izuku cocks his head to the side in confusion, "what're you doing here? I thought you were at the radio station. Weren't you talking about a big meeting or something yesterday?"

"That's over," Hizashi shrugs as he plops down in the seat across from Izuku and Oboro. "Everything's all sorted out! I was just about to head back to the school when Sho sent a text sayin' you missed your train. He said you were planning on killing time over here while you waited for the next one, but four hours is a long time, ya'dig? So, I thought I'd swing over to grab you on my way back. Plus, I haven't been here in *ages*; they have the best hot chocolate!"

"Isn't the station on the other side of the city?" Izuku arches an eyebrow, knowing he's right when Hizashi lets out a sheepish laugh.

"Can't get anythin' past you, can I, Listener?" Hizashi leans on his elbow, as a small fond smile curls onto his lips, "I wouldn't say it's on the *other* side, but you're right that it wasn't on the way. Here's the thing though, Darlin', we're *more* than happy to go outta our way for you."

"Oh," Izuku blinks, "you didn't have too though. I was okay to wait—I mean, I was the one who missed the train. Consequences of my own actions, right?"

"No, we didn't," Hizashi agrees thoughtfully, "but we want to. And honestly, neither of us were too keen to just leave you alone in the city when we can arrange a ride home for you. It doesn't matter if you missed the train or not, there are other modes of transportation and we're more than happy to come grab you instead of leaving you to wait for hours. I know you're used to doing things on your own, and you're so very sweet to not want to bother us, *but* taking care of you is never a bother."

"It's not?" Izuku glances quickly at Oboro before looking back at his guardian.

"Nope," the Pro says, popping the 'p' in the word. "You're never a bother, Kiddo. You'll never be. We like knowing you're safe and sound, and anything we can do to make your life a little easier is well worth it, yeah?"

Izuku isn't quite sure how to respond to that. It sounds so genuine. So

honest.

He's not used to people wanting to go out of their way for him. He's used to public transit and long wait times and replying on himself to get from point A to point B. Making sure he knows the bus, or train schedules and making sure he's waiting directly on time lest he miss it.

Even now, after living with his foster parents for so long he still can't help but think his problems are his problems. It's a hard habit to break, especially when he's spent so long perfecting the habit.

He doesn't know what to reply with, so he chooses the safest option, "thank you."

"It's not something you need to thank us for," Hizashi smiles softly, "but you're very welcome, Sweetheart. Don't worry about asking us for things. We're prepared to help you however you need it, ya'dig?"

"I dig," Izuku smiles shyly. He picks up his cup to distract himself with a sip.

Hizashi smiles widely, finally relaxing a little as he leans back in the booth. "So," he draws Izuku's attention back with the lighthearted drawl, "you ever come here before? What did'ya decide to try today?"

"Oh, um," Izuku shakes his head as he sets his mug down. His latte is almost gone now, and there's only a bite or two left of the croissant. "No, I just... saw the sign from outside and thought I'd check it out while I wait."

"I see, I see," Hizashi hums. He leans forwards again, settling into a lean on his crossed arms, "this place smells delicious! Just like how I remember it. It's one of those smells that just stick with you, y'know? Sho and I used to come here all the time with our friend Oboro."

The man smiles lightly as if remembering their little trio enjoying breakfast and coffee together.

He takes a deep inhale, savoring the scent of the café before he's suddenly freezing in place, head cocking in Izuku's direction. His eyes flick down to the latte before looking back up as his brow furrows, "is... that a caramel latte?"

Izuku nods, "it's really good."

Hizashi blinks slowly, looking back down at the latte pensively, “and... is that— did you get cinnamon in it?”

Izuku looks down at his own drink in surprise, “um, yeah. How did... how’d you know?”

“I just,” Hizashi swallows, “I could smell it, I guess? I've had the caramel latte here, and yours just smells... I don’t know. Different? It’s just *familiar*. One of those smells that just reminds you, ya’dig? Brings back a whole lot of memories. Oboro used to... that was his go-to drink. Caramel latte with cinnamon. He loved it. It always smelt so nice, but I don’t like cinnamon.”

“See, he’s clearly got no taste,” Oboro huffs out playfully. “Cinnamon is so underrated.”

“Oh,” Izuku breathes out, eyes flicking over to look at where the ghost is leaning on the table watching them. He refuses to actually turn his head, trying to keep his attention on the *alive* person. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Hizashi laughs, but he still looks a little shaken. “It’s just one of those weird orders, I guess. Ya’don’t see it often, probably why I associate it with him. Really reminds me of him, is all. So... uh is this something you like, Kiddo? Cinnamon in coffee? I didn’t think you really liked coffee all that much, but we can swing by the shops and grab some cinnamon if you’d like?”

“Oh, um, no. N-not usually. I just... thought I’d try something new,” Izuku bites hard at the inside of his cheek. Oboro is watching them in rapt interest now, looking between Izuku and his school friend. “A... friend told me I should try it so I... I did.”

Hizashi pauses as he processes the words. He blinks once, then a second time, eyes dropping back down to the latte before sweeping over to the remainder of the chocolate croissant, “a friend?”

Izuku nods slowly but doesn’t offer anything else. It feels like he’s suddenly in dangerous territory. Hizashi looks thoughtful, which isn't great considering Izuku is currently sat by the dead school friend Hizashi is talking about.

“How’d you like the croissant?” Hizashi asks lightly, eyes narrowed on the pastry like it hold all the secrets of the universe, “chocolate’s the best, yeah?”

“Um, yeah... uh, ‘zashi, a-are you okay?” Izuku shivers lightly as

Oboro accidentally gets too close as he shuffles awkwardly. “Did I... do something wrong?”

“Oh, no,” Hizashi jerks his attention back up, “of course not, Sweetheart, just... Oboro used to order that exact thing. Caramel latte with cinnamon in the coffee. Whipped cream and drizzle with a chocolate croissant on the side. It’s just... perfect. A bit hard to digest, ya’dig?”

The man lets out a nervous laugh, rubbing at the back of his neck as he looks away, “sorry about that, Kiddo, didn’t mean to spook ya. It’s just... it sorta feels like I’m sitting here with him. You’ve got his exact order... and... you’re just— ah, I just miss him.”

“’zashi...” Oboro sounds defeated.

Hizashi’s not looking, so Izuku quickly looks over at the ghost. His expression matches the sadness in his tone, and it hurts Izuku’s heart.

He wants to say something; do something— he hates this, hates seeing them both upset— but he *can’t*.

Nerves have already settled in his stomach, and even if he wanted to tell his guardian that his school friend is *right here* with them, nothing comes out when he opens his mouth. He’s *scared*.

He’s already in dangerous territory.

Hizashi is being so thoughtful and observant, and Izuku is already walking on thin ice.

One wrong move and he’ll be plunged under ice-cold water.

“Anyways,” a sad sounding laugh is what draws Izuku from his thoughts. “I shouldn’t get hung up on the past. It’s nice to think of him every so often, so thanks for taking your friend’s advice. You’re an adventurous little Listener!”

He looks up to Hizashi, barely able to see any remnant of the sadness that was clouding his expression just seconds earlier, “now, if you’re just about finished up, we should get going. Gotta hit the road before the traffic does, and I told Shota and Hitoshi we’d grab them both a coffee while we were here. I’m dyin’ for one of those hot chocolates! How’s about a hot chocolate for the drive, huh, Kiddo? We can talk about your interview on the way back, I mean, I was under the impression you’d be hanging around the Agency for a while, so I was

surprised to hear from Sho.”

Izuku can just offer a slow nod as he studies his guardian’s smiling face.

“Great!” Hizashi chirps, pushing himself up, “you finish up your croissant and latte and come join me in line, yeah? I’ll need more hands to carry all these drinks out!”

And just like that, Hizashi is stepping away and beelining to the line.

Izuku blinks after him, watching for a good second before he glances back at Oboro over his shoulder. The ghost offers a just as confused shrug.

He doesn’t notice his guardian’s gaze on him.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku definitely thought Togata was a ghost when they first met. It's a headcanon! I'm tempted to write a blurb in the beginning notes of the next chapter, but Idk? Thank you to Bella Moran in the comments who brought this to my attention. I laughed a lot thinking about this!

Anyways! That's a wrap on this chapter! One step closer to the end! things are starting to unravel :) Poor Shota being bamboozled by his kids and ghost, and Oboro is aboslutely a menace and I adore him. I also thought we needed some Dadmic love since he wasn't really in the last chapter, and more Oboro and Izuku being besties because they're perfect. Also, I'm not Sir Nighteye's biggest fan, so I'm sorry if that shows in this chapter. Oboro spitting facts is just *chef's kiss*. Someone needs to be Izuku's self-confidence, and it's not that anxious green-bean.

Can you guys believe this fic is over a year old now? That's wild! Over 10k kudos in just a year! Thank you all so much for liking this and supporting it! I'm sure I would've ended this ages ago if there weren't so many of you enjoying it! So thank you all!

Anyways, as always, lemme know what you thought! I love reading all your comments! Also, let me know if you think I should do the Overhaul Arc, or just skip to after it. I'm not entirely sure how to alter it without it being repetative, or ruining the ending I have planned already— suggestions appreciated! Thanks for reading! < 3

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

> Man, it's been a bit on this, hasn't it? My sincerest apologies! I feel so bad that it's been so long on this fic and my other one. Things have been very not good around here, and Christmas has been a stressful hassle, but all is well now, so here's the new chapter!
>
> I hope you like it, because I really liked writing it! I didn't do a lot of editing on this, so once again, sorry for any mistakes you happen across! Please enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the week leading up to the start of their internships isn't all that exciting.

Core classes are the same as usual, and Heroics training in the afternoon is essentially just Shota preparing them for their internships. There's a lot of paperwork that they need to fill out since these internships could very well be dangerous.

That afternoon Shota had been going over some of the paperwork, and general guidelines that Yuuei enforces when it comes to the internships. It was mostly expectations Shota, and the school, has for them when out in the workplace. It's reasonable considering everything they do will fall back onto not just the school, but the Agencies they're interning at as well.

It was basically a 'be good' and 'be respectful' lecture, and they all know they won't like what punishments come their way if Shota hear they were disrespectful or got into trouble.

Izuku had made sure to get his paperwork done as soon as he could, handing it into Shota for approval before actually needing to bring it in to the Agency with him tomorrow. He'd gotten Hizashi to bring him into the Agency to hand in the majority of his paperwork, so now all he needed was the leave pass.

This is the last piece of paperwork they all need— a signature from Shota that signs off on them being at internships during school hours and Yuuei's approval for each internship.

It's just about the end of class when the man finally passes the signed

papers out, directing everyone to make sure their representative from whichever Agency they're interning at receives it.

Izuku looks down at his own unsigned paper, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

The bell rings, and his classmates are quick to pack up; everyone excited for the following day. Izuku listens halfheartedly to the excited chatter as his friends and classmates talk about their internships as they pack up their belongings and file towards the door.

Izuku stares down at his unsigned paper.

"Earth to Izuku," Izuku startles at Hitoshi's teasing tone, "you with me, space cadet?"

"What?" Izuku blinks, folding the paper closed on instinct.

"Class is over," Hitoshi points out, "you planning on spending the night in here or...?"

Izuku glances at the clock, opening his mouth as he tries to formulate a reply—

"Midoriya."

He snaps his jaw shut, glancing up at his guardian with wide eyes.

A quick glance around the room shows Koda and Todoroki still packing up their belongings, which must be why his guardian addressed him by his family name instead of his given name. Or maybe it's the classroom setting?

"Stay behind for a moment, I need to talk to you about something."

"O-oh, um, alright, Se-Sensei," Izuku bows his head, looking over at his classmates but neither of them seems to really care he's being asked to stay behind. Todoroki arches a curious eyebrow as he slips his paperwork into his bag, and Koda just glances over quickly before tugging on his backpack and leaving with a sympathetic wave thrown in Izuku's direction.

He's glad Shota hadn't called him like this as everyone was leaving, and he suspects that was the man's intention. They're a curious bunch, and even if they're a group of mature Heroes-in-training, they're still teenagers, and this is still a school.

Todoroki pauses in the doorway, and Izuku realizes with a start that he's waiting for Izuku and Hitoshi. Hitoshi had stayed behind Izuku, leaning his hip against the backrest of Izuku's chair. Hitoshi frowns at their teacher, eyeing him suspiciously.

The Pro waves them off, shooting his nephew a bored look while managing a disinterested look at Todoroki.

"It's nothing bad," the man huffs, waving the two lingering boys off, "and it's nothing for either of you to be concerned with. Now, off you go; you'll see him at the dorms this evening. Back to the dorms, I don't want to see any hovering. If you were involved, I would've requested you by name. Shoo."

"Yes, Sensei," Todoroki bows his head, glancing at Izuku before looking at Hitoshi like he's waiting for the other boy to follow him. Todoroki and Hitoshi had gotten along well after those first couple of awkward lunches together.

Izuku wouldn't exactly call them friends just yet, but they are on the road to it. He knows from experience with both of them that neither Hitoshi nor Todoroki are quick to friendship. It takes time.

They're both stubborn and antisocial, so neither is particularly good at reaching out, but they also don't mind hanging out together. Izuku's just glad the two of them are getting along. Both need more friends, and he's glad they're working towards that.

"See you back at the dorms then?" Hitoshi cocks his head at Izuku, glancing back at his uncle before refocusing on the green-haired teen.

"Yeah," Izuku nods, "definitely."

Hitoshi nods back, finally slinging his backpack over his shoulder as he strolls towards the door. The purple-haired teen follows Todoroki out, and Izuku waves as Hitoshi pulls the door closed behind him. Only when the door is firmly shut does Izuku turn back to his guardian.

The man is distracted, typing away on his computer.

Izuku's surprised that Shota is asking to see him now— he doesn't usually talk to Izuku in the classroom; much prefers to track him down in the dorms or catch him when he joins them in the apartment for whatever reason.

A quick glance thrown back at the ghost stood behind him tells him that Oboro also has no idea what's going on. Izuku isn't sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but he knows Oboro spends more time with him now than he does his guardians for obvious ghost-seeing reasons.

Izuku knows Shota isn't one to keep a student back after dismissal, because right now, Izuku suspects he's a student and not a foster son, unless he deems it necessary.

So, this is probably important, but... well, that's *worrying*.

He wonders if it has anything to do with the paper still folded on his desktop.

"Don't look so worried," Shota huffs in amusement, giving Izuku a sideways onceover before focusing back on his computer, "just like I told your friends, it's nothing bad. I think you already know why you're here, so believe me when I say you're not in trouble. I just wanted to talk. Now, come up here so we can have an actual conversation. Have a seat somewhere while I finish this email off and then we'll talk."

Izuku nods, grabbing his belongings and standing up.

He holds the folded-up paper in his hands, frowning down at it as he inches closer to the front of the room. Shota is refocused on his computer, so Izuku trails along to the rows of desks, pulling himself up onto the one closest to the teacher's desk, which just so happens to be Hagakure's desk.

He watches his guardian type for a second before casually glancing sideways, where he spots Oboro sitting crisscross along the entirety of Shoji's desktop.

"I wonder what's got him so worried," Oboro comments lightly, scanning Shota with a frown. "Think it's got something to do with that?"

Oboro gestures to the paper in Izuku's hands, and Izuku tightens his hold on the paper. He knows Oboro had been reading over his shoulder, and he knows the ghost knows his paper is unsigned. It's hard to hide something from an entity that is constantly with you, not that he needs to hide anything from Oboro.

Izuku cocks his head in silent question before looking over at his guardian and trying scan the man and see what Oboro sees. He doesn't

really spot anything that could be worry, Shota just looks focused to him, so he looks back at Oboro and awaits the ghost's train of thought.

"He's distracted," Oboro offers, finally glancing at Izuku, "and that's not his usual frown— more tension. He's thinking. Plus, it never takes him this long to type out an email. He's efficient, even in emails."

Izuku turns the words over in his head, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth as he thinks.

Shota had said he wasn't in trouble, but was he? Had he done something wrong? Had All Might said something? Had Sir Nighteye said something to All Might, and then All Might had said something to Shota? Had Sir Nighteye actually rejected him? Was he being expelled?

No.

Probably not. Sir Nighteye hasn't talked to All Might in years, and even if he had reported that Izuku was an awful successor, All Might would've come to him and not Shota.

Right?

"Problem Child?"

Izuku startles, blinking wide eyes up at his guardian.

"You okay?" Shota asks calmly, one eyebrow arched up in silent question as he takes Izuku in. He's moved from behind the desk and is not leaning against the edge of it right in front of Izuku. He's half sitting, and half leaning, arm laced over his chest as he angles his head in a studying manner. He looks a bit worried. "I told you that you weren't in trouble."

"But I could be— I mean, I got held back after classes, right?" Izuku tells him in lieu of actually answering if he was okay or not. "That *always* means you're in trouble. Plus, you, like, never do this! Why else would you keep me back after classes when you could talk to me at the dorms, or in the apartment or even text me."

"Calm down a bit," Shota directs from his place, "take a breath, Izuku, you're not in trouble. I promise you this is just a talk. A check-in. It's a school matter, not a personal matter, hence us talking in a classroom setting instead of a personal one. I just need to talk to you; as a teacher and a student."

“Okay,” Izuku breathes out, trying to calm his hammering heart.

He feels silly for working himself into such a panic.

Of course Sir Nighteye didn’t talk to All Might, and All Might didn’t tell Shota.

It’s a *secret.*

“Sorry.”

“No need for that,” Shota shakes his head, flapping a dismissive hand, “you ready to talk now, or would you like a minute?”

“I’m okay,” Izuku nods quickly, “um, w-what did you want to talk about then?”

Shota studies him, takes him in entirely before blowing out a sigh through his nose and shifting himself so he’s more perched on the edge of his desk, “I never got a chance to talk to you after your internship interview. How did it go?”

“My…” Izuku pauses, glancing sideways at Oboro, who looks just as confused, “…why?”

As far as he knows, Shota hadn’t really been asking them about their interviews. Back when they’d first started looking into Agencies they could intern at, and preparing to apply and actually do the interviews, Shota had said he wasn’t going to hover.

A lot of the class had joked about how their teacher probably just wanted to take more naps, but Izuku suspected this was more so a ruse for the man to see how they manage on their own without making it obvious that’s what he’s doing. They had to find their own Agency to apply to, had to actually apply into the internship program and do it in a professional way that would get them an actual interview. They had to be ready for said interview; act, speak and *be* professional and mature, enough so that Heroes and Agencies were willing to take the gamble on them.

This wasn’t like the work studies where Heroes and Agencies reached out to them, and there was a list of preapproved places for them to go, this was in their futures in their hands entirely, and Shota made a point of handing over control.

All that said though, Izuku thinks this is the most involved Shota has

been with the class.

He's watching, and studying, and probably even grading how they're handling things on their own.

This, applying to Agencies and being mature Heroes-in-training, is what they'll be doing after they graduate. This is real life experience in their profession and Shota is allowing them to learn it on their own. To *experience* it in a safe environment where can still do damage control and help them if they need it.

But that doesn't explain why Shota is curious now. Izuku realizes with a start that he'd been far too quiet, gaze lifting to where Shota is so obviously studying him. The man hadn't replied, so Izuku assumes he doesn't think it's worth answering.

He opens his mouth once to respond but shuts his mouth with a click of his teeth as he tries to formulate a response. He opens his mouth again, finally managing to come up with an answer, "it... it was fine. Why?"

"Fine," his guardian repeats softly, mouth curling into a frown as he does so. "Okay. Tell me about it? What sort of questions did Sir Nighteye ask you? How was the interview?"

"Um," Izuku's eyes dart towards Oboro, "why are you asking?"

"I'm your teacher," Shota deadpans, "I'm allowed to ask."

"You didn't ask anyone else."

"I didn't need to ask anyone else," Shota counters patiently, "I am asking you though."

"...why?" Izuku frowns, "why are you asking me and not anyone else?"

Shota studies him for a long second before sighing, "Togata came looking for you this afternoon. Over lunch period; said he couldn't find you in the cafeteria so he thought he'd try looking in the classroom."

"What?" Izuku frowns. Togata had come looking for him? Why? He hadn't even talked to Togata since that morning that he'd met Sir Nighteye. When Izuku had bailed on taking the train home together. "I was having lunch with Hitoshi outside. Why was Togata-Senpai

looking for me? Was it important? Is it something to do with the internship? Should I go see Togata-Senpai...?"

"He was worried about you. Wanted to check in with you and see how you were after meeting Sir Nighteye," Shota says slowly. "And when he didn't find you, he came to me."

"Why was he worried about me?" Izuku cocks his head.

"You tell me," Shota frowns. "Why *is* he worried about you? Surely you can see why I'd be pulling you aside for this. Not only did he text me after your interview, telling me you left when you were supposed to catch the train back with him, but he comes looking for you today as well, wondering how you're doing after the interview. After meeting Sir Nighteye."

Izuku blinks owlishly as everything seems to click into place.

"You didn't sign my papers," Izuku accuses softly, fingers tightening around the paper he's still clutching. "I'm supposed to bring these with me tomorrow— you said they were important, but you didn't sign off on them."

"I didn't," Shota doesn't beat around the bush. "I wanted to talk to you before I signed anything."

"I... don't understand," Izuku whispers, unfolding the paper and staring at the blank line. "Why is it such a big deal? The interview wasn't *great*, but I was still approved..."

"Look, Kiddo," the man says tiredly, endlessly patient, "you know I'm supposed to be protecting you students; that's part of my job as your teacher and all of your current guardian. I'm having doubts about sending you to Nighteye Agency. You've been... *different* since that interview and even if I could ignore that, I can't ignore an upperclassman who's been interning at this specific Agency for years coming to me worried about you."

"Doubts...?" Izuku frowns. "It really wasn't that bad—"

"This is the first big step you students are taking," Shota angles his head in Izuku's direction, eyeing him, "and it needs to be in the right direction. A positive direction. You're all learning. You need a mentor who will help you learn. Who will teach you. I need you all to be in a place where I'm certain you'll be treated fairly, and I don't get the feeling you will be at Nighteye Agency. There's no question Sir

Nighteye isn't an amazing Hero, but I'm not so sure this is the right place for you to be.

"I know I said you'd be doing this on your own, and I'm sorry I need to cut in, but I'm not going to sign off on sending you somewhere I know you won't be happy— where I know you aren't going to get what you *need*. Togata's worry is serious. As the upperclassman who was with you— who I've taught for three years now— I trust his word and judgment. And even your reaction today, your hesitance, is worrying.

"Something happened at that interview. I can read between the lines, Problem Child, even if I don't have a discernable answer. You weren't okay after that interview, and I have different sources telling me the exact same thing. Even Hizashi thought you looked... *worn* after your interview. That's concerning. I have been a teacher and Pro long enough to know when to trust my gut, and something here isn't sitting right."

Izuku looks away sharply, frowning at his lap. "It wasn't that bad."

"But it *was* bad," his guardian cuts to the chase. The man leans back faintly, glaring up at the ceiling for a moment before dropping his gaze back to Izuku, "and that's where the problem lies here, Kiddo. It shouldn't be *'not that bad'*, not when we're talking about an internship at a Hero Agency that's supposed to be teaching and training you. It should be good. You should be excited; your first step into the world of Heroics. That's *exciting*."

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but his guardian draws in a breath and continues stiffly before Izuku can even formulate a response, "I've been teaching Heroics for many years now, and I can see the difference between excited and dreading. Care to take a guess of where I've placed you?"

"I am excited," Izuku whispers, staring hard at his hands, "honestly. I'm excited to use my Provisional License and help people. I want to learn, and I'm excited to work with Togata-Senpai, and Bubble Girl seems so nice too! I can learn a lot from them, and I think patrol with Senpai will be beneficial once I learn the area better and there are a lot of other great Heroes in the Agency too who I'm sure will help me —"

"That's all great, Izuku," Shota cuts him off softly, hesitating before clearing his throat, "but notice how you didn't once mention working

with Sir Nighteye."

Izuku snaps his mouth shut, wincing when he realizes the man's right.

He should be excited to work with the man who started the Agency— the biggest name in the place. All Might's one and only ex-Sidekick. It's the logical thing— wanting to learn from the best within the Agency walls, but Izuku can't bring himself to be excited about that.

He's scared to be compared to Togata constantly.

He's scared to be compared to All Might.

He's scared of everything Sir Nighteye said, and the doubts he'd managed to nestle so very easily into the back of Izuku's mind. He's scared that Sir Nighteye will somehow find a way to get further into his head. To make him doubt himself more.

He's scared to work with someone who knows about One for All; someone who's known longer than Izuku has. Someone who knows what the Quirk is capable of when in the right hands.

He's scared of not living up to unobtainable expectations and proving the Pro *right*.

He's afraid Sir Nighteye will see even more flaws than he's already pointed out, and that he'll see where someone else could do better, *be* better. He's already decided Izuku isn't worthy, the thought of having that shoved down his throat every day when he just wants to learn is nauseating.

Izuku isn't sure he can handle that.

Shota sighs, rubbing his eyes before focusing entirely on Izuku. Undivided attention that almost makes Izuku want to squirm. "I know that you generally tend to be nervous, and anxious. I know that; I've seen it since I met you, but this is different. Something was said, or done, and you're *scared*. That doesn't sit right with me. Not as your guardian, and certainly not as your teacher about to sign off on handing you over to a place you're scared to be."

Izuku bites his tongue, unable to even meet Shota's gaze.

He's right, but Izuku doesn't want to admit it.

"I want to intern at Nighteye Agency," Izuku tells his teacher instead.

“I… think I can learn a lot. I want to patrol with Togata-Senpai. I know Sir Nighteye doesn’t… I don’t think he’s fond of me, but I know I can learn from him too.”

“What do you mean he’s not *fond* of you?”

Izuku winces, lifting one shoulder up in a shrug.

“Izuku,” Shota calls, voice bordering on stern, yet still soft and prompting, “what happened during that interview? You’ve gotta understand that saying that your new mentor isn’t fond of you is cause for worry. If he’s acting in a way in which you get an impression that he doesn’t like you, which is unacceptable by the way, then something needs to be done. If we don’t do anything now, it’ll just open doors to discrimination and mistreatment down the road. That’s not okay.”

“It was nothing—”

“Don’t tell me it was nothing,” Shota sighs, and he sounds so tired. He readjusts himself so his palms are pressing against the desktop on either side of him, “we both know it’s not true. I know something went down at that interview, Kid. I can’t ignore the fact that the other student with you is worried about you enough to seek you out. I can’t ignore the fact that you left your interview for some reason, when you’d planned to stay there all afternoon. I can’t just ignore this, Izuku, not when it comes to your safety. I just want to help.”

“You should just tell him, ‘zuku.”

Izuku prides himself in the fact he doesn’t turn to look at Oboro despite the ghost’s voice startling him. He drags in a slow breath, dragging his knees up to his chest so the heel of his shoes dig into the edge of Hagakure’s desk. He wraps his arms around his knees, settling his chin on the gap between his knees.

He draws in another breath, staring down at his now hanging toes, “it just seemed a little unfair.”

“Unfair?” Shota questions softly, shifting once again so he’s now sitting fully on his own desk, “explain it to me, Kiddo, I want to be on your side.”

“Well,” Izuku swallows, eyes flicking up to his guardian before returning to his shoes, “I was prepared for a lot— I mean, I think we all were? Hard questions. Why I wanted to be a Hero. Why would I fit in at the Agency. All… all that stuff.”

“But he didn’t ask any of those questions?” Shota guesses lightly.

Izuku quirks a small smile as he shakes his head, “I had to make him laugh.”

“You had to make him… *laugh*?” Izuku hears incredulity in the man’s tone. “That’s… odd.”

Izuku nods, turning his head so his cheek is now resting on his knee. The angle works in his favor too, as he can now see the ghost. Oboro is frowning, hands tucked in the gap between his crossed legs.

It doesn’t take more than a second for Oboro’s gaze to snap to Izuku, offering a tiny encouraging smile, “it’s weird as hell is what Shota means.”

“What happened then?” Shota cocks his head to the side, “did you make him laugh? Was that the whole interview?”

“I didn’t,” Izuku whispers, picking at a thread on his shoelace, “Sir Nighteye is a huge All Might fan—”

“Sounds like someone else I know,” Shota offers drily, but with a playful smile. Izuku appreciates the attempt at lightening the mood.

“Bigger,” Izuku looks back at his guardian, “if you thought I had a lot of All Might merch, you should see Sir’s office. It was amazing. He had such cool merch— like limited edition stuff I only ever saw online! I mean, the re-sale value of a lot of his merch is like, well over a hundred thousand yen! If I was a couple years younger, I would’ve been *drooling*.”

His guardian lets out an amused hum, waiting for Izuku to continue.

Izuku hesitates now, looking away again, “I just… I thought I could make an All Might joke, sorta. He wanted me to make him laugh, and I saw the merch, so I thought… maybe… that he’d think an impression was funny.”

“But he didn’t,” Shota reads easily between the lines.

“He did not,” Izuku swallows. “I… thought I failed then. I think I did fail, technically. I offended him. Like, I thought he was going to kick me out! I thought it was funny… but, um, but he didn’t. It wasn’t offensive at all, I swear— I mean, I’d never do anything to belittle or mock All Might, I think he’s *amazing*—”

“I believe you,” Shota hushes, “I know you wouldn’t, and I’m sure it wasn’t offensive. And Yagi’s got thick skin either way. You can’t know everyone’s sense of humor, hence a *‘make me laugh’* test being ridiculous. I was unaware that’s how Sir Nighteye does his interviews. Togata never said anything.”

“Togata-Senpai is funny,” Izuku offers. *And he’s the one Sir Nighteye truly believes should inherit One for All*, Izuku doesn’t mention. He drums a finger against his knee, biting his bottom lip.

Shota is thoughtfully quiet for a second as Izuku stares at the ghost.

“I thought it was funny too,” Oboro bows his head, “you really emulated All Might. Sir Nighteye is just a stuck-up fanboy with his head shoved so far up *All Might*’s ass that he can’t handle a little joke.”

Izuku snorts a laugh, covering it up with a cough.

“If you didn’t make him laugh,” Shota says slowly, like he’s trying to understand, “how did you get the internship? You have the signed paperwork, so I know you were accepted into Nighteye Agency’s intern program. What else happened?”

“Um,” Izuku frowns, “there was a... second part of the interview? I guess it was put in place for if someone didn’t make him laugh, or... I don’t know, maybe he came up with it on the spot just for me? It was more physical, I guess?”

“Physical?” Shota repeats, eyes narrowing, “physical how?”

“I had to take something from him. Um, using my Quirk. He... he doesn’t like my Quirk—” or, he doesn’t like that *I* have the Quirk, “—very much, so he wanted to see me use it. I... I failed that one too. I don’t know how I was supposed to take it from him. He knew what I was going to do. I just... it wasn’t very fair. I really tried.”

“He used his Quirk on you.” Shota doesn’t ask, he says. It’s not a question, it’s a statement. He knows, and if by the angry flicker of red in his gaze, he’s *mad* about the fact. “He wanted you to take something from him, but he knew exactly what you’d do in the specified timeframe. He could predict everything because he knew what would happen.”

Izuku nods sadly, “yeah, I guess...”

“That’s unacceptable.”

Izuku jerks his attention up, mouth agape as Shota fumes. His features have darkened, and even his tone is dry and annoyed. His eyes are sharp, but Izuku knows nothing in the man's anger is directed at him.

"That's so obviously rigged. Completely rigged. How did he expect you to do something other than what he predicted? If he used *Foresight*, you wouldn't stand a chance of taking something from him, and that has nothing to do with your skill level and how far you've come, it's simply a *fact*. He would've been ready to counter anything you threw at him."

Shota stares, exasperated, at the wall behind Izuku, just over Izuku's head.

"That's *unacceptable*." The man repeats like he just can't believe what's being said, his tone sour. "He gave you not one, but two, illogical tests to determine your worth as a Hero. Two tests that have *nothing* to do with Heroics and what this school has been teaching and training you for."

"I don't mind," Izuku whispers, playing with his own fingers, "I just thought it was a bit unfair."

"I mind," his guardian huffs, "and it was. Sir Nighteye has the right to run his Agency however he sees fit, but that doesn't mean Yuuei has to include Nighteye Agency in their program. Rejection is a part of Heroics, just like any profession, but being rejected because you can make someone laugh? Because you can't outsmart your own future being viewed and used against you? That's not something I want to send my students into."

"No!" Izuku yelps, staring wide-eyed, "you can't... Togata-Senpai is *happy* at Nighteye Agency! He's learning loads, and he's comfortable with the Sidekicks and staff and Sir Nighteye is a great mentor for him. And I want to learn from Sir and his Sidekicks too. It's just *me* he doesn't like, Shota—"

"Which is a problem in and of itself," the man cuts him off sharply, "that was mistreatment, Izuku. He gave you an irrational test, and when you didn't pass that one, he gave you a rigged test you wouldn't pass no matter how good, or clever you were. He set you up for failure."

"But I passed," Izuku reminds softly.

"You did," Shota agrees, "but if what you're telling me is right, you

didn't make him laugh, and then you didn't manage to take the item from him. How did you pass?"

Izuku is quiet. He isn't really sure, honestly. He'd thought he failed. He really, really had. He hadn't managed to pass either of Sir Nighteye's tests, and the man wasn't exactly nice and Izuku had been overwhelmed and then— he'd just passed. Somehow. "I... don't know."

"That's not teaching," Shota shakes his head. "He didn't tell you why you failed, or why you passed. Did he tell you that you did anything right in the time you were at the Agency with him? Was it all negative? It's starting to sound to me like he had no intention of even letting you into the program. It sounds like he was biased against you before you even took his first test, and if he was like that on the first day, I can't see it getting any better, Kiddo."

Izuku's silence is answer enough to the man's questions.

Shota's shoulders slump as he blows out a long sigh. Izuku can't meet his eyes.

"I can't approve this, Izuku," Shota tells him quietly. "I can't sign off on sending you to a place where I know you won't be treated fairly. This has nothing to do with the fact you're my foster son, I'd be having this talk with any student in your position. I don't want any of you in environments that are harmful; either physically, or emotionally like this appears to be.

"If I sign off on this, it could very well be detrimental to your learning and growth as a Hero. I have no say in what Sir Nighteye does in his Agency, how he hires Sidekicks and interns, but I sure as hell have the right to protect my students from a toxic environment. I'm sorry, but I can't let you intern there."

"But I made it into the program!" Izuku argues, "I-I passed his test! He wanted me to fail, but I-I somehow passed! I can't just give it up! I worked hard, Shota, please—y-you can't just—"

"I can," the man sighs, and Izuku's jaw snaps shut, "I know you don't like it, but Nighteye Agency isn't the right fit for you. I don't believe it will be a safe place for you personally to learn. I refuse to send my students off to an Agency where they'll be treated unfairly. Toxic working environments are draining, Izuku, you don't want to be somewhere where everything you do is *wrong*."

“But I want to intern at Nighteye Agency,” Izuku bows his head, voice nothing but a whisper. “I was excited to patrol that area, and to work with and learn from Togata-Senpai. I know he can teach me a lot. He was excited to work with me, and the deadline for internships has already passed— I can’t just find another one! I don’t want to fall behind again, Shota, I was finally catching up to everyone else. Don’t make me skip the internships—”

“Hey, calm down a bit and take a breath, Izuku.” Izuku does, sucking in a gulp of air. He hadn’t realized his voice was getting steadily louder as he panicked. “I’m not making you skip the internships. I’m aware that the deadlines have passed, but that doesn’t mean there are no options.”

Izuku sucks in a couple more breaths, trying to swallow down the panic.

He knows this is a conversation, Shota is making it into a conversation instead of it all being one-sided, but he still can’t help but feel he isn’t being heard.

And he gets it— it's Shota’s job to protect them, and he can’t lie and say he hasn’t been worried about unfair treatment from Sir either, but it also doesn’t feel fair that he has an internship position at Nighteye Agency that he isn’t allowed to take. He passed the tests and jumped through the hoops and worked hard to impress Sir Nighteye and he somehow managed to! It doesn’t feel fair that all this effort is going to waste, and he’s getting vetoed—

“Talk to me, Problem Child,” Shota calls his attention back. He still looks so calm—so ready to hear Izuku out. “I want to understand. You know that he isn’t particularly fond of you, but you still want to intern at Nighteye Agency. Take me through it.”

“I just... I think I can learn a lot,” Izuku croaks out.

He doesn’t know why he’s so upset.

He knows Shota is only trying to keep him safe and doesn’t doubt the man would take the same actions he is now if it was Uraraka, or Kaminari, or Satou in his position.

He knows Sir Nighteye isn’t in favor of him being the next wielder of One for All, but the man still knows about it. He’s watched All Might work with it for years—the only Sidekick the man ever took on—and Sir has been subtly training Togata to inherit the Quirk, so he must

have some information, or tricks, or even just helpful advice for Izuku.

He can't pass it up. Any help he can get, he needs.

"What can you learn with Sir Nighteye that you can't learn anywhere else?"

Izuku shrugs without a word, glaring down at his knees. He'd let his arms fall from where they'd been wrapped around his knees, and at some point he'd let his thighs settle on the desktop, legs hanging over the edge. He laces his fingers together and sets them in his lap like a scolded schoolboy.

Shota lets the conversation lapse for a moment when Izuku doesn't verbally respond.

"You do understand why we're having this conversation, right?"

Izuku nods slowly, looking up at his guardian briefly before dropping his gaze back to his lap. He hears Shota sigh again, listens to the man as he shifts and then hears Oboro squeak out.

When he lifts his gaze, it's Shota sitting on Shoji's desktop now, with Oboro standing behind him with a glare of annoyance. The ghost has his arms crossed over his chest; eyes narrowed. It's clear the ghost had thrown himself backwards off the desk to avoid interacting with Shota.

"How about we make a deal?"

Izuku freezes, turning the words over in his head before lifting his attention to his guardian slowly.

"What kind of deal?"

Shota is quiet for a long second, and Izuku waits silently for the man to explain, "I can't sign off on a full-time internship— not when I don't trust you'll be treated fairly. You should be somewhere I know you'll get fair treatment, and that's non-negotiable. But you're right that you worked hard to get the intern position, and you obviously want to intern at Nighteye Agency for whatever reason. I think we can compromise."

"Compromise?" Izuku blinks owlishly, "how?"

"I'll talk to Nezu about a split internship."

“A what?” Izuku cocks his head to the side, watching his guardian and the ghost. Oboro’s shoulders have lost the tension from almost being phased through, and he’s now watching Shota in interest.

Izuku’s never heard of a split internship.

“Internships at Yuuei aren’t as clear cut as they seem,” Shota offers patiently, eyeing Izuku thoughtfully, “most of you have a clear idea what you want to be— limelight, underground, rescue— and you’re all choosing Heroes and Agencies under each specific category depending on what kind of Hero you want to be. Ideally, that’s how the program runs, but there are instances where students don’t know exactly their place in the Heroics system. We try to encourage students to pick one internship, but logically, that’s not always an option.

“We’ve had students occasionally take on a few different internships, breaking their time up between different Agencies and Heroes. Your first year is the year you’ll really grow into the kind of Hero you want to be. There’s nothing wrong with not knowing where you fall into the scale of things and wanting to try different paths before things get harder and more finalized in the second and third years.”

“We could’ve done two internships?” Izuku blinks, “you never mentioned that.”

“Like I said, it’s not ideal,” Shota shrugs, leaning forwards so his elbows are on his thighs and his hands laced together hanging between his knees. “It isn’t even a decision I can really make on my own. I’ll need approval from Nezu, and it really is a lot of additional work on my end and your end. I’ll need to get in touch with any and all Agencies you’re interning at as well, and they need to approve it too. This program is a learning experience, but a lot of Agencies are relying on having interns around.”

“So if I do this split internship I can... intern at Nighteye Agency?”

“Partially,” Shota hesitates before nodding, “this is important to you, so we’ll find a way. I’ll speak with Sir Nighteye, or a representative from Nighteye Agency, and sort out the details. I just want you to know that the only reason I’m considering this is because I know how Sasaki runs his internship program. He’s not as personally involved as other Agencies are, so it’s likely you won’t be working with him as much as you will be the other interns and the Sidekicks.

“If you’re going to be interning at Nighteye Agency, even just part-

time, I still want you sticking close to Togata. I trust he'll watch your back if something should arise with Sir Nighteye, just like he did during the interview. If I can't be there, I want someone I trust to make sure you're not being singled out or mistreated. Sasaki's internship program is, more or less, interns teaching interns, so you'll most likely be shadowing Togata. I'd like to limit your interactions with Sasaki, but I know that's unreasonable, so try to stay around Togata."

Shota's quiet for a second, studying Izuku. He blows out a breath frowning apologetically, "I'm afraid this is the best I can offer you; limiting your interactions and ensuring at least one Agency is teaching you properly and unbiased, while still allowing you to patrol and learn with Togata. Sound good?"

"That-that sounds amazing," Izuku breathes out. "But... will Nezu-Sensei agree to that? And... and where else will I intern? I mean... the deadline has passed. I doubt anyone will want to take me now."

"I doubt Nezu will be a problem," Shota shrugs, finally pushing himself up off the desktop. He stretches out his back and rakes his fingers through his hair. "As for your other internship, I'm sure a teacher at the school wouldn't mind having you as a shadow part-time. And worse comes to worst, you can check out my Agency and see how underground Heroics works. That, though, will clash with your day schedule, so I'd like that to be a last resort. I don't want your sleep schedule ending up as shitty as mine."

Izuku snickers at his guardian's drawl, and Shota even ends up quirking an amused smile.

"Anyways, that sound good?"

"Sounds amazing," Izuku tells him with a thankful nod.

Much to Izuku's surprise, Nezu-Sensei is quick to agree to a split internship. Shota is reporting back that they'd gotten the principal stamp of approval only an hour or so after he leaves for the meeting.

Izuku is relieved.

When they have the approval to continue forwards with the split internship, Shota urges Izuku to decide on another Agency or Pro to work under since at this point they're past the deadline for interviews, and the internships will be starting the following day.

It's very last minute, but Shota assures him that it won't be a problem.

Shota can't make any further arrangements without having that second Agency selected, so Izuku really has to pick someone and hope they don't mind him asking for an interview so late. He doesn't think many of the teachers will mind, but he still feels bad.

After some thought (and convincing from Oboro), Izuku decides to ask Hizashi if he can intern with him the remainder of the time.

It's not just that Hizashi is his guardian— in fact, Hizashi being his guardian is part of the reason why he's hesitant to even ask. He doesn't want any favoritism, even though he knows Hizashi would never.

He's always loved Present Mic. He'd listened diligently every week to the man's radio show growing up, and Izuku had always thought Voice was an interesting Quirk.

Voice was an intricate Quirk; one that had probably taken years to figure out. Izuku honestly can't imagine a baby, or a toddler having something as powerful as Voice before they even really know what a Quirk is and the potential dangers that come with them.

Having your Quirk be something like your voice is difficult considering how much one actually speaks in day-to-day life. And it's not just speaking; it's noises and sounds. Any vocal noise that comes from his larynx is directly affected by his Quirk. Not to mention how much damage Voice could do if Hizashi wasn't as good with Quirk control as he is.

Hizashi is able to do so much with his Quirk, and it's amazing.

He knows his guardian can teach him about Quirk control. Something like Voice is hard to control, and One for All is also hard to control, so maybe if Sir Nighteye can't offer anything useful, Hizashi can?

It's the most logical decision when it comes to choosing a secondary internship with one of his teachers. All his teachers are great, really, and he'd love to intern with all of them, but none have a Quirk quite as... complicated as One for All. Hizashi is the closest he's come, and he knows, if all else fails, Hizashi will be able to give him some useful pointers even if he doesn't know the secret of One for All.

Plus Hizashi is just such a great Hero.

He's a staple, really. He's not charting by any means, but he's a household name that focuses more on the civilians than popularity polls. He does a lot of good as a Hero, and as a radio host. *Put Your Hands Up* radio does so much charity work, and events that raise money for important causes.

Hizashi is always involved.

He's positive and kind and Izuku wants to be a Hero like him someday.

At this rate he wants to be a perfect mix of All Might, Present Mic and Eraserhead.

A smile like All Might; no matter what situation he's facing. Something civilians and victims can rely on. He wants to be kind and upbeat like Present Mic; a friendly face that people know will help no matter what. And he wants to be calm and shrewd like Eraserhead; logical and to the point. Getting the job done, while also making people feel safe.

He doesn't know what that says about him, but it's a secret he'll take to the grave.

Hizashi, much to Izuku's surprise, actually takes the request very seriously.

Not that he didn't think his guardian *wouldn't* take this seriously just... he'd been a little worried Hizashi would accept him in as an intern just because Izuku is his foster kid.

That fear, however, is very far from what really happens though.

The man takes the paperwork Izuku offers with a nervous hand and reads through everything as they sit at the kitchen table together. He asks questions; the type Izuku had been expecting Sir Nighteye to ask, and they do a quick interview in the kitchen while Shota makes them all tea.

This is more of an interview, at home with his guardians, than he'd gotten with Sir Nighteye while actually in an official interview. He tries not to dwell on the differences in professionalism.

By the time Izuku leaves the upstairs apartment he has another stamp of approval, a second internship position and Shota has promised to work on arranging the split internship. The man assures him that he'll

be able to get everything arranged by the following morning considering the other internship advisor is sitting at his side waiting to help organize everything.

When everything is said and done with the organization of the split internship, Izuku couldn't be more pleased with what his homeroom teacher had managed to pull together in such a short amount of time.

He's been granted permission to intern at Nighteye Agency on the three days a week that Togata has morning individual patrol. Togata will be his Agency mentor, even if technically Bubble Girl is their mentor followed by a chain of command the leads to Sir Nighteye at the top who oversees everything. Still, Izuku will be patrolling and largely learning from his upperclassman.

When he's not at Nighteye Agency, he'll be shadowing and working with Hizashi.

Izuku's sure this is where he'll learn how Agencies actually run since Togata-Senpai is also an intern and won't have as much power over what he teaches and shows Izuku on those three days they work together. Izuku isn't sure how much Sir Nighteye will even let him in on considering he doesn't like him very much.

He also... doesn't know what the man will think about Izuku requesting a split internship.

He tries not to think about that though.

Hizashi's schedule isn't just about patrols, though Izuku is sure he'll go on a couple during his internship too. There're events, both relating to his Hero hosted radio show as well as his actual Hero career. Being a household name means he's pretty publicized, so there's bound to be more to that than Izuku knows. He knows Hizashi is busy between his three jobs, and he knows all three tend to bleed into each other, so he'd stoked to see how everything falls into place.

Hizashi doesn't own his own Agency like Sir Nighteye does. He'd started off as a Sidekick and had eventually been partnered in with a handful of other Heroes. Izuku hadn't ever really thought of Heroes getting promotions within Agencies— interns becoming Sidekicks and Sidekicks becoming Heroes— Izuku is honestly curious to see what the means in terms of how the Agency runs and operates.

The following day, Izuku's first official day of interning, Shota drives Izuku and Togata to Nighteye Agency.

Izuku isn't quite sure why his teacher chooses to bring them in when he'd already made sure the rest of Izuku's entire class knows the public transportation schedules that'll be getting them to and from their internship— Izuku knows his own as well, so he's surprised to find Shota waiting in the common area of the dorms, dressed in his Hero costume.

Togata doesn't seem phased when he strolls into the 1-A dorms to see Shota ready to tag along with them. The older boy just shoots a wide smile between his kōhai and Sensei, accepting the offer of a ride easily.

Shota and Izuku explain the details of Izuku's split internship to the upperclassman, and Togata seems interested in it, even seems to agree that it's a good call for Izuku; Shota doesn't hide his frown very well.

"Yeah, Sir's not usually like that," Togata had sighed, from the passenger's seat of the car. "I think you caught him on an off day, not that that's any excuse for how he treated you. It still wasn't very cool of him. I don't think I've ever seen him react like that— it was weird. Anyways, you're my kōhai, Midoriya, and I'd be a pretty awful Hero if I wasn't looking out for you as well, so I'll totally watch your back, and I know you'll watch mine! We'll be great partners, eh? I'm glad you decided to intern at Nighteye Agency still, even if it's only part of the time!"

The first day of internships is really just orientation. Izuku meets other interns; some students from other schools and some just low ranking Heroes trying out different Agencies. He meets the Sidekicks too, and gets to change into his costume.

Shota had... disappeared when they'd first arrived, and Izuku later sees him coming out of Sir Nighteye's office with a sour looking expression. Annoyance is clear in the man's body language, but Izuku thinks better of going off to talk to his guardian, especially when Sir Nighteye leaves his office, looking equally as annoyed.

Shota leaves after that, slipping out the doors with nothing more then a halfhearted wave in Izuku's direction when the man notices him watching him. He's gone before Izuku can even think to offer his own wave in return.

He wonders what Shota and Sir Nighteye were talking about.

Probably nothing good if they both look so peeved.

His first day at Nighteye Agency goes better than he'd anticipated. Sir Nighteye is nice enough when he does end up talking to Izuku and Togata about the patrol route they'll be taking. It's Togata's original patrol route from his own first year internship program that they're assigned to.

It's nice to know Togata will know what he's doing and Izuku will hopefully manage to keep up with him. He really thinks Togata is the best partner he could have.

Patrol with Togata-Senpai is the first time he meets her.

That little girl who shook his very existence to the core.

Patrol had started off easy enough— Togata-Senpai had been excited and enthusiastic to be teaching Izuku. Sir Nighteye and Bubble Girl were both busy scoping out their newest target, a villain by the name of Chisaki Kai. A yakuza leader.

They'd attended the briefing just that morning before patrol, but Togata hadn't been sure if they'd be allowed to help with the case when surveillance was complete, and Sir Nighteye was ready to launch the raid. Izuku knows interns are generally left out of the sensitive and dangerous cases, especially the student interns.

Still, they'd been included in the briefing, and it sounds like it'll be a good raid learning experience. He's glad they're getting to branch out in different aspects of Heroics: patrols, raids, office work. Heroics is more then just swooping in to save the day and it's nice that they're letting the students experience that.

Izuku hopes Sir Nighteye can put the grudge he has against Izuku behind them, so it doesn't affect Izuku's growth. Benching them from an important mission within the Agency just because he's upset that Izuku has One for All instead of Togata would be awful.

Izuku likes to think Sir Nighteye would never, but... well, he doesn't really know anymore.

Still, even if they're not a part of the Shie Hassaikai case, this is still a pretty good introduction to patrolling. It had started off way better than his first patrol with Gran Torino.

Or... that's what he'd thought, at least.

It's not every day that a small child rushes at you from a dark, dead-

end alleyway. That said, it's not exactly strange either. Izuku doesn't think any Hero can say they've never helped a lost child before—

Small children are notorious for slipping away from their parents. All it takes is a second for a child to get distracted and wander away. Izuku knows he used to get completely distracted by Hero merch stores whenever he went to the mall with his mother when he was little.

He knows he also used to trail after ghosts, which is a habit he's yet to really kick. It makes it worse considering Izuku could hardly tell the difference between alive and ghost when he was little, so he was essentially following after strangers. It's a miracle that he'd never gotten kidnapped or something.

He's gotten better at that though, even if he still sucks at telling the difference between ghosts and living people. His awareness has improved over the years, and as it turns out, ghosts tailing him is more so the problem now.

Still, it was easy for children to slip away and get lost in crowds.

It was just as easy for children to slip out their own doors if they're not being watched.

At first, that's exactly what Izuku suspects this it.

Izuku's not paying attention, so when the small forces barrels into him, he's thrown off guard.

The child, a little girl with long silvery-blue hair and worried red eyes, is what he finds when he rights his own footing before he topples over and glances sideways. She's dressed in a dress or... maybe rags? He's not quite sure. They're not in the best part of town, and homelessness is a very real problem.

The little girl hadn't been as lucky— the force of bumping into her sending her to her hands and knees. She's so small. He doesn't interact with kids much, not that he doesn't like them. She looks fragile though, just because she's so tiny.

"Sorry," Izuku makes sure to smile kindly and keep his voice upbeat and calming. She's still on the ground, so he reaches a hand down to help her up as he continues, "that must've hurt—"

And she flinches away.

Izuku freezes.

He feels Oboro over his shoulder, and he knows Togata-Senpai is watching from just a couple steps over. Izuku crouches down so he's on the same level as the child, close enough to help her up when she's ready.

"Izuku..." Izuku hears the ghost behind him mutter his name quietly, almost confused and cautious, but Izuku's focus is on the little girl. She trembles, even as he lowers his hand back to his lap. He doesn't want to cause her anymore fear. The way she'd flinched from him repeats in his head, and he can't help but wonder what he did wrong.

She's trembling. She'd flinched. She's scared.

The realization stuns him, but he tries not to let in interfere with how he handles this.

He lets his gaze survey over the little girl, eyes flicking from her face, down to her arms, then down to her legs. Her limbs are wrapped in bandages. Entirely. What had happened to her? Is she hurt? Had she gotten even more hurt when she'd fallen?

"Izuku," Oboro calls a second time, yet this time his tone is serious in a way Izuku so rarely hears. It's serious enough that he glances quickly over his shoulder, seeing the ghost staring wide-eyed down the alleyway. Izuku sweeps his attention in the same direction, breath catching in his lungs when he sees it.

It's... the little girl. But it's not. And it's not just one. There's at least four— four small children trailing after the one in front of Izuku. Izuku blinks as he takes in the scene, then drops his gaze back to the child in front of him. Is she... no, she can't be a ghost. Togata is watching the interaction between Izuku and the small girl, so she must be real but... who are they?

"Help," the little girl closest to the one he's kneeled beside says softly. Her head is bowed, ruby red eyes he'd seen as she approached directed towards the ground in a movement that's so submissive it makes Izuku's stomach churn. "Help her."

Oboro sucks in a breath as Izuku feels himself drowns in his own.

He looks past the little girl who'd spoken to the three others behind her.

They're not real— not *alive*— he can tell.

They flicker in a way he's never seen a ghost and as he stares, he notices something else.

They're all in various stages of fading. The ghost who'd spoken is the clearest—no different than Oboro behind Izuku. She's clear, and hesitant, eyes flicking between Izuku and the living child. The living child who looks just like them. Five identical children.

The one next is faded enough for Izuku to notice, and the one after her even more so.

The pattern continues until his gaze catches on the last little girl, movements echoey like she can't keep up, and nearly entirely faded.

"You can see us," the ghost closest to them accuses, eyes dark with fear. "Please. Help her. You have to!"

The second ghost steps closer to the first, settling beside her. They really are identical, or they would be if it weren't for the fading of the second ghost. Their expression match to a tee, and Izuku feels dread pooling in his stomach. Despite his confusion, he knows there's something not right about this; he can sense the danger here and he can't seem to stop his hand from twitching; the subconscious jerk of grabbing the child and running the only thing he can really think about.

He knows he can't do that. As much as he wants to.

"Save her," the second ghost pleads, hand reaching out as if to grab at Izuku. She stills before pulling her hands back, fingers interlacing together and settling against her front. "Save *us*."

"He's coming," the third ghost calls, voice staticky and echoing in a way that almost makes his ears ring. She's so faded it hurts his heart. He's never seen ghosts fade— didn't know it could happen, but he doesn't think there's anything about this that's normal.

The fourth ghost twitches like a lagging television screen, limbs flickering out of existence as she moves to join the others where they'd slowly built a half circle around Izuku and the child. She moves slow, a weakness that he's never seen in a ghost. She opens her mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. Not a sound. He thinks she's talking but... he hears nothing.

She closes her mouth when she comes to the same conclusion, glancing around at the other ghosts before an expression of hurt and devastation crossing her small features. Izuku wants to reach out and hug her but knows better than to.

What... what is this? What's happening right now? Why are there so many of the same child—multiple ghosts of the same little girl. How is she alive but... but *not*?

"She'll be gone soon," the second ghost whispers when she notices Izuku's eyes jerking over the last ghost. Her own tone is sad; soft but accepting. "We all will. We always fade..."

"Help her," the first ghost says again. She's obviously the strongest of the bunch; voice clear and resignation in her tone. The demand is soft, coming from a child, but still stern.

"Izuku... what—"

"I'm sorry," Izuku tells the child, focusing back on the living little girl. He feels back about cutting Oboro off, but he can only focus on one thing at as time, and this child is it. "Here, let me help you up—"

He slips his hands under her arms and goes to lift her, but pauses as her body tenses up.

He opens his mouth to console her; the rest of the children falling worryingly silent. Izuku tries not to be worried, focusing back on the living little girl, but someone else beats him to speaking.

"You should be more careful."

The voice startles him, as does how all the little girls tense like the voice is *danger*.

Izuku's attention jerks up. He has half a mind to usher all the little girls behind him, and Oboro seems to have the same idea as he's suddenly in front of the girls, between them and the voice slowly getting closer.

The man strolls closer, "...you don't want to go around causing trouble for Heroes."

The little girl, the living one, trembles harder as she inches closer to Izuku. She doesn't reach for him, but she's close enough that she could. She looks like she wants to but doesn't.

“Help, please,” the first ghost’s voice drops desperately, cowering away from the man—the villain. That’s the man Sir Nighteye is investigating. That’s the target. They stumbled upon Sir Nighteye’s target. Crap. This bad.

“Izuku…” Oboro calls again, uncertain, “that’s… Overhaul. What do we do?”

The child is still on the ground, and he’s still kneeled next to her.

It would be so easy to snatch her and run, but there’s so much he doesn’t know.

The man who’d been talking settles unknowingly beside Oboro. The ghost snarls, arm out like he’ll be able to stop a living person from getting any closer. Izuku grits his teeth, eyeing the man cautiously. There’s something about him that makes Izuku uncomfortable, and it’s not just the fact his presence makes the girls, not just ghosts tremble with fear.

He’d almost look normal, but there really is something… dark about him. Even if Izuku didn’t know that this man was Chisaki, there’s something about him that makes Izuku wary.

“I’m hope you’ll forgive my daughter, Hero,” Chisaki drawls uninterestedly. The lack of any emotion is another red flag, not to mention how the girl winces lightly as he speaks. The ghosts have all clustered together behind Oboro, watching Izuku intently like they’re waiting for him to react.

He doesn’t know how to.

He doesn’t know what to do.

Almost as if he can read Izuku’s thoughts, Chisaki offers a smile behind a mask that’s so natural it can’t be real. He’s too calm considering a child wrapped in *bandages* had just *flinched* away from a Hero.

“She’s always playing around,” he says easily, tone light like he’s an exasperated father fretting over his child. It doesn’t feel right. This is a villain. Izuku tenses to grab a hold of the little girl and get her far away. “Always bumping into things, getting hurt. She’s a bit clumsy.”

Izuku can’t help but notice he’s already excusing the bandages the little girl is wearing.

Izuku feels his mask being pulled down over his face before he can point that out, and then Togata is talking about it— goodnaturedly muttering something about getting it resized, but before Izuku can mutter a thing, his upperclassman's attention is back on Chisaki.

"I'm so sorry about that!" Izuku jerks his attention back towards Togata-Senpai. The older boy rubs at the back of his neck with an apologetic smile. What is he doing? Is he not seeing what Izuku's seeing? Does he not realize who it is they're talking to? The danger here? Even if he can't see the *ghosts* of this little girl too, he *should* see how she's reacting. They know who this man is. "We're sorry too, for bumping into her."

It takes a second for Izuku to realize Togata is doing damage control. He has to have realized too. Deescalating the situation. Something must've shown on Izuku's face, and the last thing they need is this... this *villain* reading into his expression.

Togata is still talking, but he's not really saying anything much.

He's chatting the villain up and being completely natural; casually inquiring about the man without making it obvious. Izuku still has a lot to learn. Where Izuku's first instinct is to run, Togata's is to appease and deflect.

Chisaki doesn't appear to be onto them and... and if he is, nothing shows in his expression.

"Don't mind the mask," Chisaki says casually. "It keeps out the filth. I don't remember seeing you two heroes before."

The curiosity in them curls in Izuku's stomach. Not good.

"Ah, right!" Togata gives a sheepish laugh, eyes flicking to where Izuku is still on the ground with the child. Izuku doesn't know what he reads in Togata's expression. "We're still pretty new. You probably could've guessed that though! Whelp, on your feet, partner! Can't do much Heroing from the ground!"

It feels like Togata's words go in one ear and out the other.

Izuku can't push himself up, doesn't want to.

He doesn't like how the man's interest has strayed from his supposed child and onto them.

He's barely batted an eye at the little girl, or Izuku, attention on Togata. His attention is too sharp to just be curious, it makes Izuku's stomach tighten with nerves. He knows this is something far bigger than he'd first suspected— even bigger than Sir Nighteye's suspected.

"I see," the man hums thoughtfully, and something in it has Izuku's blood freezing in his veins. The ghosts are all silent, even Oboro, who's watching though narrowed eyes. "And what Agency do you two belong to?"

"Oh!" Togata smiles in return, looking a bit thrown off too. "Well, we're just students! We're still so new so it would be presumptuous to identify with an Agency. We're just using our internships to get some experience—oh, speaking of which! We're supposed to be finished patrolling this division by lunch! Let's go!"

Izuku can't believe his ears. They're leaving? Just like that? They're leaving the little girl to the villain? *What?* It doesn't feel right. He can't just... he can't look out into this sea of the same little face, little ghost faces, and leave. They need help. This living child needs help.

"Please..." the second ghost whines, "you can save us!"

Izuku curls his fingers into the fabric of her dress, fingers tightening as he bites his lip.

"Izuku..." Oboro whispers, "you need to follow his lead."

Izuku wants to whip around to face the ghost. How can Oboro say that? How can they just... leave? Oboro is seeing exactly what Izuku is. How can he say to walk away? These ghosts shouldn't be here—not if this little girl is still living. And there shouldn't be *multiple*.

How can Oboro ignore the pleas of these girls?

"He's Sir Nighteye's target," the ghost says stiffly, like the words taste wrong, "the guy's an asshole, but he's still a good Hero. You can't risk giving anything away, man. You can't make it worse right now. This guy is dangerous. Follow Togata. Report back to Sir Nighteye. He can help her. Don't do anything stupid."

"R-right," Izuku says after mulling it over for no longer than half a second. He hesitates from pushing himself up. He's responding to Oboro, but it also passes as a reply to Togata too.

When he finally does move to pull away from the little girl he freezes

when small hands entangle with his costume, a small, tiny voice just barely loud enough for him to hear, “please... please d-don't go...”

It’s the same voice he’d been hearing since spotting the little girl and her multitude of ghosts. They really are all the same— all the ghosts almost like *echoes* of this child. It’s the exact same child-like plea that the ghosts have been begging for help with.

He can’t.

He doesn’t know how Togata is doing it. He can’t leave this child. He doesn’t know what Chisaki is doing to her, but it’s something bad. It’s something... awful. How is he supposed to ignore a distraught child? Distraught ghost children? They know this man is bad so... why aren’t they saving her?

“U-um, excuse me... I-I’m sorry, but—” Izuku breaths out, hoping his voice stays level. Oboro winces, so Izuku assumes he hadn’t quite managed it. Crap. “Y-your daughter seems scared...”

The man’s expression tightens and Izuku feels like he’s messed up. Oboro sucks in a breath, shifting a bit more so the ghost children can’t see him. They’re still cowering, desperate eyes on Izuku.

“A reaction to being scolded,” Chisaki insists, voice clipped.

Izuku feels Togata’s eyes on him now, and he can’t help but feel they’re disapproving.

“Izuku,” Oboro glances over at Izuku, “you’re making him suspicious. You need to let her go— we can’t save her. Not on our own. I know it feels wrong, but we can’t do this alone...”

“Sure,” Togata agrees lightly, smile wide.

Izuku tries to pull away without really trying. He doesn’t use force, and he doesn’t dare touch the trembling child. She’s clutching at him, all her strength hanging onto his costume.

He feels her crying, and his heart shatters. He can’t leave her. He can’t, but he *has* to.

Oboro is right. They don’t know what they’re up against. Sir Nighteye is investigating Chisaki. There will be *teams* in the raid. They’re powerful. One for All is powerful, but he can’t throw himself into a fight right now— not when there’s a chance this little girl will end up

in the middle of it.

Izuku doesn't really remember what he says. He's running on panic and adrenaline, making excuses that are shot down. Togata is casually stiff behind him and Oboro is gnawing on his bottom lip, looking as torn up about this as Izuku feels.

The conversation is in one ear and out the other, his own body speaking and reacting on autopilot.

Eri. That's the name he'd just said, isn't it?

The girl trembles, crying without making a sound. It breaks his heart. He knows Togata wants to leave, Oboro urging them in that direction too, but it just... it feels wrong. He knows they probably know best but how can they say that when it means leaving Eri in Chisaki's hands?

He doesn't know what happens.

One second, he's clutching Eri in his hands, following Chisaki back into the alleyway. They're talking; Togata and Chisaki mostly, while Izuku just cradles Eri to himself, intent on keeping her safe. He isn't really following the conversation. He's heeding all the warnings; the ghosts and Eri's own.

Togata had agreed, a silent, mutual understanding. They can't leave her— that's not what a Hero would do— so they trudge forwards after Chisaki; Togata is at his side and Oboro a step behind them, the crowd of Eri ghosts trail after them like ducklings, all crowded together and fearful.

He hears the gasp.

Eri gasping lightly, almost inaudibly as she squirms in his arms, and the ghost behind them gasp as well like there was some threat no one but them understands. The ghosts are crying, quiet and terrified, while Eri tugs to be set down. He hadn't really been a part of the conversation despite weighing in.

She pushes off of him urgently, squirming until he releases his rip enough for her to squirm her way out. She drops to the ground and runs towards Chisaki. Her little hand slips into his and he's quick to tighten his hold on her hand like he doesn't trust her to stay by his side again.

Izuku doesn't understand.

He doesn't get it.

What just happened?

The ghost Eris all take off after her, keeping distance from Chisaki, but keeping close to Eri too.

"Eri..." Izuku calls, heart thrumming in his chest. She still looks so scared, even as she settles at Chisaki's side; nodding when he chides her. There's fear in her eyes, and the ghosts have gone deathly quiet too. "A-are you... are you sure?"

"She's always like this," Chisaki mutters, unaware of the ghosts wincing as he speaks. They're all pleading silently, staring at Izuku with wide red eyes he's not sure he'll ever forget. "Sorry to involve you in our family drama. I'm sure you have better things to be doing. Good luck with your internships."

Izuku moves to go after them but is stopped by Togata's arm. Oboro also plants himself in front of Izuku, expression regretful, but stern. "I'm sorry, 'zuku," Oboro shakes his head sadly, "but you need to listen to Togata. He knows what he's doing... there're protocols you need to follow so you don't make this worse. This is your first patrol, but it's not his. And it's not mine either."

At that, Izuku slowly angles his head up to look at his upperclassman, knowing the ghost is right even if it feels like his heart is shattering. He'd been so focused on Eri he hadn't even noticed Chisaki snapping. He hadn't noticed the villain preparing to get violent.

Togata is right—this isn't a fight they're prepared for. They can't help Eri if they scare Chisaki away before they can get the chance to rescue her. Sir Nighteye is setting up an intricate domino pattern; all it'll take is for Izuku to bump into one and send the whole thing tumbling down.

This doesn't feel like a win at all.

Izuku hesitates for a second as Togata turns to leave the alleyway. He's right that they need to report back to Sir Nigheye. Izuku's glad his upperclassman doesn't hover; trusts him not to charge into a fight he's ill prepared for.

As much as he wants to.

He squeezes his hands into fists, eyes following suit when he can no

longer see Chisaki or Eri through the darkness of the alley. He sucks in a breath, trying to calm himself down.

It gives him a second to breath.

And to look around, because he and his ghost aren't alone.

Izuku hadn't noticed the first ghost child, the clearest one, hiding behind Oboro. He'd been too focused on watching Eri return to her captor to think about counting the ghosts. Oboro hadn't noticed either, jumping when he finally spots his small shadow.

The little girl is curled in on herself where she stands, staring up between the both of them with wide, pleading eyes. One hand clutches at the hem of her dress, while her other squeezes at her locked elbow. She looks so scared, eyes darting back in the direction Chisaki had taken the living Eri.

"Please help us," she pleads again, voice soft as she glances back down the alleyway a second time, nervously. She twitches like she needs to follow after them but doesn't move now that she has Izuku's attention. "He... he hurts us. He *makes* us. Please help, Hero. She's so scared. We... *we're* so scared."

Izuku swallows, nodding. He kneels down so he's at her level, knowing Togata is probably waiting for him now. He needs to hurry before his Senpai comes looking for him. "We will, Eri-chan. Please hold on, okay? The Heroes are working on helping you, you just... need to wait a little bit longer, alright?"

The ghost offers a tiny, scared smile, "she'll try. Please hurry..."

Izuku watches the little ghost child turn away, running to catch up with Eri and the other ghosts.

His heart hurts.

"We'll rescue her, Izuku," Oboro sets a hand on Izuku's shoulder, giving a comforting squeeze before letting the contact fall. "We'll help them; we just can't do it alone. There's no 'I' in 'team'. When you start thinking there is... that's when Heroes wind up dead."

"Yeah," Izuku swallows, "we'll help them. All of them."

Chapter End Notes

So I read through the comments on the last chapter (over 200 of them!) and it seemed pretty split on the Overhaul arc. I've decided that I'll include it, but not entirely. Bits and pieces. The only legit scene I'll be including is the patrol in the chapter, just because I loved the idea of Eri's consciousness splitting into echoes of her each time she's put back together. It won't be long, and I only plan to have this chapter and the next chapter revolved around it.

I hope the split internship makes sense. I didn't want him just being with Sir Nighteye, but I'm not sure how much or if I'll write any of Izuku at Hizashi's internship at all. Mostly just something I thought up on the spot so Shota's talk with Izuku would have more backing.

Anyways! Thank you so much for taking the time to read, and thank you for any comments! I love reading what you guys think and what you have to say! I can honestly say all your comments have been like pops of dopamine over this past month, so thank you all! <3

Also, no promises, but I might have some surprises planned :)

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Surprise :) Its me again!

Just as a fair warning for this chapter, I did not go back and watch any of the Overhaul arc besides that one scene with Togata and Izuku from the last chapter. It's not a favorite of mine, which is why I was contemplating skipping it entirel, but here we are! I'm going off the top of my head and making stuff up to fill in the blanks, so please don't expect accuracy. It's not going to be very anime/manga repetative because a lot of it will be brushed over. Apologies in advance since I know a lot of you like this arc!

Anyways! On with the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku goes home that night feeling distraught.

He and Togata-Senpai had reported to Sir Nighteye, and the man himself had been equally as surprised about the situation. Eri's existence had been a shock to everyone, but that had just made the whole Shie Hassaikai situation all the more dire.

They can't just leave her in his hands for however long it would take Sir Nighteye to complete his surveillance of the Yakuza group—

Izuku had made that point clear, and he didn't even care if it pissed Sir Nighteye off.

A child being kept by a villain is bad, but what's worse is a child being held by a villain who has ghosts of herself trailing after her. He hadn't known how to express this to Togata, Sir Nighteye and the rest of the Heroes involved in the case, but he'd made sure they knew he was very insistent they got to Eri as fast as possible.

They'd been dismissed shortly after; told to return to school for the evening. Sir and his Sidekicks had promised they'd be looking into Eri and Chisaki, and that they'd find a way to move the raid up despite being unprepared to do so.

Izuku and Togata had sullenly boarded the train together.

Oboro had trailed after them until they reached the train, at which point he'd waved Izuku off and left. The green-haired teen assumed the ghost just needed a second to think, and that's proven right when Oboro is leaning against a post at the train station closest to Yuuei.

The walk to campus is just as quiet, and they hardly even look at each other as they scan their IDs and are granted access to the school grounds. Izuku feels... he's not really sure. He doesn't think he's really feeling anything right now. His head feels fuzzy, and there's a pit of dread in his stomach that he hasn't been able to shake since the ghost of Eri had trailed off after her alive self and the man Izuku assumes had played a role in creating the ghosts.

Izuku moves on autopilot when they finally make it to the 1-A Heights Alliance building—Togata offering an empathetic pat on the shoulder and a smile that doesn't reach his eyes in the slightest before disappearing in the direction of the 3-A dorms.

Izuku stands for a second, in the doorway of the dorms. The door had shut behind him, and he hears chatter coming from further in the dorms.

He doesn't know what to say, or what to do.

He stares down at his shoes, clutching the case with his Hero costume in it to his chest as his bottom lip wobbles. His classmates sound so happy, and a quick count of the shoes tells him eight of his peers are back from their studies. More will be return, he knows, so he can't just stand in the doorway.

He toes off his shoes but doesn't release his hold on his case.

He debates slipping past his friends and disappearing into his dorm room, but the thought sends a spark of anxiety through his chest. He doesn't know why.

He turns to the stairs anyways, slipping into the stairwell without alerting anyone of his presence.

He's not sure he's ever felt so dissociated. Oboro trails a step or so behind him but doesn't say a thing. He doesn't get too close, and if Izuku couldn't feel the chill of the entity, he wouldn't have even noticed his ghostly shadow.

The apartment is unlocked, which Izuku could cry at.

If it had've been locked he would've abandoned the idea of coming up here. He has the key in his pocket, knows it's there, but he doesn't have the energy to unlock the door himself. He pushes the door open and slips inside, biting his bottom lip as his eyes water.

He doesn't make it as far into the apartment as he had in the dorms without being noticed. His guardians are two Pro Heroes, so that's probably a given, right?

"Oh, heyo, Sunshine!" Hizashi greets brightly, after just a quick glance thrown over his shoulder to identify. It's no surprise Hizashi is able to place him even when he's not entirely visible in the doorway. Even though he probably hadn't seen Izuku, it's not hard to figure out who'd be returning so early, especially since Shota is supposed to be training with Hitoshi this evening in hopes of getting him to the point where he's ready to participate in the provisional license exam being held in Tokyo in the upcoming weeks.

He wasn't to a point where either Shota or Hitoshi himself felt confident with his ability to pass when Todoroki and Kacchan had gone to the remedial lessons and exam for their licenses. It wouldn't be fair to throw him into that just yet, so the Tokyo exam seems like the best option all around. He'll be participating in the second half of the internships if all goes according to plan.

The faster Hitoshi is able to intern at Agencies like the rest of the class, the better it'll be. Izuku would hate for his friend to be stuck behind everyone else like he'd been when he first received One for All. It sucked.

Izuku draws himself away from the thoughts of his friend, realizing he hadn't responded to Hizashi. He hadn't even opened his mouth, and when he tries to now, he finds he can't.

He feels... hollow.

He wants to reply to Hizashi, but... he doesn't think he can right now.

He has no energy, and what little is there is being used to shove down the tears threatening to fall.

Izuku has no idea how he'd even managed to make it up and into the upstairs apartment. He thinks he was moving solely on autopilot after he and Togata-Senpai had quietly split up outside the 1-A Heights Alliance building.

Izuku's not sure why he even trekked all the way upstairs when he could've just gone to his dorm room. It makes no sense to him, but here he is.

Hizashi is turned towards the sink, scrubbing at root vegetables. There's also a box of instant curry cubes on the counter, as well as a package of chicken, so Izuku assumes that's what's for dinner. They haven't had curry in a while, but Izuku can't manage to feel any excitement. The thought of eating makes him queasy.

He can't feel anything but *guilt*. Suffocating and pitting in his stomach, a fierce anxiety that makes him feel physically sick. All he can think about is that little girl. Eri.

Eri who'd returned to her captor to protect *them* from Chisaki, and ghosts— Eri's ghosts. Echoes of an abused little child. He can only *theorize* why there would be ghosts of a living little girl, and everything he thinks makes his stomach churn harder. He swallows, pushing down the image of the little girl cowering just out of arms reach, eyes wide with fear.

Izuku wonders how Hizashi's first day of interning with Kaminari and Jirou had gone, and decides it was probably better than his own consider Izuku is seconds away from crying, and Hizashi is humming cheerily to himself as he waits for a reply from Izuku.

Izuku realizes he must take too long when Hizashi glances over his shoulder again, scrubbing at a potato as he speaks, "sooo? How was your day? First official patrol, eh? How was it? Togata show you the ropes and all that jazz?"

Izuku steps into the kitchen silently, feet dragging as he beelines towards his guardian.

Izuku reaches Hizashi just as the man is turning fully to look at him, eyebrow cocked in confusion at Izuku's silence. Izuku doesn't hesitate to step right up to Hizashi as the man turns to him, pushing himself against his guardian and burying his face in the Hero's shirt.

Hizashi stills for a second, not tense but unsure at the suddenness, and then his arms are wrapping around Izuku's shoulders gently. Izuku sniffles, wrapping his own arms around his guardian and grabbing fistfuls of the back of Hizashi's shirt just for something to do with his clenching hands.

He presses his face even further into Hizashi's chest when the man

doesn't push him away.

Not that he thinks Hizashi would.

"Sweetheart?" Hizashi coos softly, hand dragging a light line up and down Izuku's shoulder as he returns the hug. The man's hands are wet from the sink, but Izuku doesn't care, "you okay?"

Izuku still doesn't speak, shaking his head and pressing his nose into the fabric of Hizashi's shirt. Hizashi must take the lack of answer for what it is as one of his hands comes up to cup the back of his head as he hums lightly.

"That's okay, honey. Not feelin' talking, huh? That's perfectly fine," Hizashi mumbles out, leaning down to press a kiss to the top of Izuku's head, "why don't we go sit down on the couch, yeah? I bet you're pretty tired, and I could totally use some quiet time too. C'mon, sunshine."

Izuku lets himself be guided into the living room, following Hizashi's lead entirely. He moves numbly, heart thudding in his chest. He's faintly aware of Oboro trailing behind them— the ghost had been oddly quiet since they'd left the alleyway without Eri.

Hizashi plops down on the couch first and Izuku takes just a second to stare blankly at him.

Hizashi pats the spot beside him, and that's all it takes for Izuku to all but fall over, instantly curling into Hizashi's waiting arms. He pulls his knees up so he's almost laying in a fetal position, cuddling into Hizashi without really meaning to.

Fingers card through his curls, and Hizashi's thumb, where his other arm is settled along Izuku's shoulders securely, drags comforting lines back and forth along his shoulder. Izuku curls even closer as he sinks into the comfort, squeezing his eyes shut.

Hizashi shifts, settling into the couch and pulling Izuku closer until he's completely curled into his guardian's side. The man's hand doesn't stray from his curls, carding lightly and even carefully tousling stray curls. Soft mumbles fill the room, and it takes an embarrassingly long amount of time for Izuku to realize Hizashi had turned the television on.

The white noise and gentle fingers in his hair and on his back lull him.

He doesn't even know when he starts crying, but Hizashi's fingers don't stop carding, and he's lightly hushing Izuku and he doesn't know why he can't keep it together. Hizashi doesn't say anything or ask why Izuku's so upset; he just holds him while he cries and offers quiet affirmations.

He thinks of helpless little Eri, all alone with someone like *Chisaki*. He thinks of those ghosts of a terrified little girl, who'd all pleaded for help; scared and helpless and *fading away*— ghosts who *shouldn't* even exist but *do*.

He cries for a while, time a foreign concept to him as he keeps his face buried in Hizashi's shirt. The blonde says nothing— doesn't try to console him or ask what's wrong— just sits with him and comforts him. His loud cries eventually settle into sobs, and sobs into sniffles before Izuku stutters through hiccupping breaths.

He doesn't know when he quiets down.

The room falls nearly silent; soft murmuring of the television is the only noise to be heard besides Izuku's stuffy breaths. Hizashi continues petting through his hair and Izuku doesn't so much as move.

He doesn't know how much time passes until the door opens again.

He's in that weird state of half-awake and half-asleep, but the sound of the apartment door opening has him curling further into himself, Hizashi's hand is stilling in his hair for the first time since they'd settled on the couch. He doesn't take away the grounding hand, just pauses his movements.

"Hizashi," comes Shota's voice from the genkan. Izuku hears the clatter of his boots hitting the floor, his voice sounding distant. "Have you heard from Izuku? 'toshi and I have both been texting him, but he hasn't responded to either of us. I didn't see him downstairs, but I know he and Togata should've returned by now."

Izuku tucks his face closer to Hizashi, phone in his pocket suddenly weighing him down. He feels even more guilty than he already did knowing he'd been ignoring his guardian and friend.

He hadn't even realized— he'd turned it to silent before patrol since it would be a distraction otherwise. He hadn't... been much in the mood to look at the small device on either the train ride back to school, or the walk through school grounds. He and Togata had hardly said a word between them after leaving Sir Nighteye's office.

“Yeah, he’s been up here with me,” Hizashi replies quietly, just loud enough for Shota to hear in the genkan. It’s weird hearing Hizashi so *quiet*— trying not to disturb the blanket of tranquility that had formed in the time since they’d settled on the couch.

How long has it been…?

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut as Hizashi’s nails scratch lightly against his scalp.

The man continues, as footsteps draw near, “we’ve just been… *chillin’* for a bit, ya’dig?”

“Chilling?” Shota asks, voice sounding a lot closer now. Hizashi shifts enough that Izuku suspects he’s angling himself to look at Shota, and Izuku knows he should be opening his eyes and acknowledging his other guardian, but he just can’t seem to make it happen. “*Oh.*”

“Listener had a rough day, I suspect,” Hizashi says softly, hand flattening on top of Izuku’s head. “Hasn’t been very talkative, but there’s nothing wrong with that, is there, ‘zuku?”

A second palm settles on his head, just below his hairline. The touch is just as soft as Hizashi’s, but the hand is more calloused than Hizashi’s are. Izuku knows it’s years of capture weapon work that’s toughened up his guardian’s hands. The featherlike hand pushes up into his hair, gently pulling his bangs and stray curls out of his face as it goes.

Izuku finally finds the motivation to sliver his eyes open, blinking owlishly at Shota who’s crouched by the couch. He’s still wearing his capture weapon and costume, hair tied up in a messy bun like it always is when he’s working on capture weapon control with Hitoshi.

“Hey, you with us, Sweetheart?” Hizashi asks, fingers trailing back through his bangs. “It’s okay if you still need some time; that’s completely fine. Take all the time you need, yeah? No need to rush these things.”

Shota pulls his hand back but doesn’t make any moves towards standing.

Izuku glances up at Hizashi before looking over at Shota. He peers faintly around the Underground Hero, spotting Oboro, who’d been uncharacteristically quiet, knees drawn to his own chest with his forehead pressing to his knees, face hidden away.

Maybe leaving Eri had been harder for him than he'd led on. Izuku still can't help but feel annoyed that Togata and Oboro had been so instant they withdraw—he understands why, but that doesn't mean it's right at all. He'd seen the fear. Not just in Eri's eyes, but in the eyes of all those ghosts as well.

Izuku draws in an unsteady breath and nods slowly in reply.

Hizashi's fingers have migrated down, dragging light nails down Izuku's spine. Izuku shivers as they trail over his uniform. It's distantly familiar— maybe something his mom used to do, but he can't pinpoint any specific moment. It just feels nice. Calming.

Shota shifts, Izuku sees it out of the corner of his eye. The man stands just enough that he can sit on the coffee table next to them, studying Izuku with concern. Izuku blinks red, raw eyes shut before refocusing on his guardian.

Shota glances over at Hizashi before looking back at Izuku, expression softening, "how're you feeling?"

He still can't find his voice. He sniffles and unfurls a hand to drag along his eyes. His eyes hurt, but he knows it's just from crying. He lifts a shoulder into a half-hearted shrug, swallowing hard.

"That's okay," Hizashi tells him. "Nothing wrong with that. We all have bad days, yeah?"

Izuku manages another little nod, squeezing his eyes shut. There's an almost overwhelming amount of understanding in this room. He's not used to it. It's overwhelming, but it's also exactly what he'd been craving when he trekked up the stairs to the apartment.

Neither guardian seems to mind just sitting with Izuku.

Hizashi's arm is still around him, twirling a single green curl around his finger, while Shota's leaned forwards enough that he's able to set his hand on Izuku's folded up knee, thumb stroking lightly. It's just enough contact that he doesn't feel overcrowded, but he still feels completely safe and content.

"You feeling up to talking, Kiddo?" Shota's voice is the one that breaks the silence. Izuku looks at him, thinking the questions over before offering a tiny nod.

The man returns a nod of his own, clearly thinking his next question

over.

“Was this something Sir Nighteye did?”

“No,” Izuku lets out a humorless laugh, voice hoarse as he wipes at his eyes again, “Sir was very professional. He... wasn’t the... um, the *problem*. It was something else. Something... something—” Izuku swallows unsure of how to continue. “Something else.”

He doesn’t even know if he’s allowed to tell his guardians. They’re both Pros, sure, but that doesn’t mean anything if the mission is confidential— which it is. Just because they’re both Pros doesn’t mean they’re privy to other Agencies and Heroes cases.

Shota studies him before seeming to deem that the truth. The man blinks, leaning back onto his hands. Shota scans Izuku up and down before frowning, “if it wasn’t Sir Nighteye, then did something happen on patrol?”

He offers yet another unhelpful shrug, looking away so his expression can’t give anything away. He doesn’t know how to answer without answering. He’s sure he’ll only put himself further in Sir Nighteye’s bad books if he spills confidential information with uninvolved Heroes.

It must give away more than he thought it would because Shota and Hizashi are exchanging a look.

“Was it... something we can help with?” Hizashi asks quietly as Izuku shifts enough that he’s now sitting up. “Or something... uh, *confidential*?”

“Confidential, I think?” Izuku croaks out, leaning against the back of the couch and tugging his knees up to his chest. “I don’t know. He didn’t... I don’t know.”

Shota opens his mouth to say something else, but his phone ringing cuts him off.

The Pro pauses, reaching to dig his cellphone out of his utility belt pouch. He stares at the incoming call with an odd look on his face before standing and answering with phone with a gruff: “Eraserhead.”

The man shoots Izuku and Hizashi one last look, phone pressed to his ear, before he’s turning and walking towards the bedrooms without a word to either of them. It’s not the first time either Pro has done

something like this— Izuku understands the secrecy when it comes to their Hero jobs.

It must just be something confidential and important.

Izuku feels tears spring to his eyes, palming hard at his eye sockets to wipe them away before they can streak down his cheeks. He tears his gaze away from the direction Shota had just disappeared and looks up at Hizashi instead. He's not surprised to see his guardian watching him with a soft, concerned look.

Izuku lets out another humorless laugh, rubbing his eyes dry again, "I don't... know why I'm so upset. This is part of the job— I signed up for this. I just can't... I know we did everything right but still... I-I feel awful. I'm sorry—"

"Shh," Hizashi pets his hair, "it's okay, this is a part of Heroics, Kiddo, you're allowed to be overwhelmed. Things are going to get overwhelming. Do you think we've never been in states like this? Trust me, Sunshine, when Sho and I were first starting out, things were hard. It's a lesson every young Hero learns at some point or another. You... you lose people, and sometimes you can't help everyone no matter how hard you try. There will be times when things don't go according to plan. There's nothing wrong with being emotional after a hard day; I'm glad you're not bottling things up. You're doing just fine, alright? Don't be sorry."

Izuku shifts enough that he can hug Hizashi, and he relaxes into the embrace when Hizashi returns the hug just as fiercely. He's calmed down some—the quiet evening with Hizashi had been just what he needed, and he no longer feels like he's about to start sobbing.

He doesn't feel great, but he's definitely cried out.

They sit for just a little while longer until Izuku's the one who breaks the embrace. He pulls away and rubs at his eyes again, managing a little smile in Hizashi's direction. The man returns something just as soft.

"Feeling any better?" Hizashi cocks his head to the side in question, "I know Hero work and patrols can be rough, especially when you're first starting out, but don't let it deter you, okay? You'll be a great Hero, ya'dig? You'll have bad days, and bad patrols, but you'll also have *good* days and *good* patrols."

Izuku gives a shy nod, looking away as Hizashi finally pushes himself

up with a toothy smile.

“Atta boy,” his guardian coos lightly, ruffling through Izuku’s curls, “I’m going to go grab you some water, and then I’ll get started on dinner. Think you’ll be okay alone in here for a bit?”

“Yeah,” Izuku nods, “thank you. I’ll be okay. I... feel a bit better now. Thank you for—”

“No thanks needed, Sunshine,” Hizashi cuts him off lightly, sporting a grin. “Seriously, don’t hesitate to come to me or Sho if you need it, yeah? And never think you need to thank us for helping you through stuff like this. We want you to trust us enough to come to us when you’re upset or hurt or sick— whenever you need us. I am so proud of you for coming to me when you needed it today; you just remember we’ll always be here for you, alright, sweetheart?”

“I will,” Izuku bows his head, hoping to hide his flushed cheeks. He doesn’t know if it’s from the crying, or Hizashi being so attentive to him. “Thank you.”

Hizashi huffs a laugh, and it takes Izuku just a second to realize he’s still thanking the man after he’d just told him he doesn’t need to. Izuku blows out his own amused breath, dropping his attention to his lap.

Hizashi disappears into the kitchen, only to return a second later with a glass of water. He hands it to Izuku, and chances another ruffle of his curls before parting.

“You good with chicken curry for dinner? It’ll be a bit of a late one, but we’re no strangers to late dinners around here! I bet you worked up an appetite on patrol, huh?” Hizashi had paused in the kitchen doorway, peeking back into the room.

There’s something so touching about the attention to detail; Hizashi is so clearly offering to alter his plans for Izuku if he’d like—if it would help him feel better— but Izuku just nods with a small smile, “sounds good.”

Izuku stares into the water as his guardian retreats to the kitchen again, the sound of the faucet turning back on which is swiftly followed by the quick chops of a knife on a cutting board.

He’s lost in thought as he stares down at his water. He does feel better after sitting with Hizashi, but it still doesn’t sit right. He still doesn’t

know if he did the right thing. She'd been so close— within arm's reach and they'd still left without her.

This is the kind of stuff that no one ever talks about being a part of being a Hero.

The isolation of it.

He has this knowledge that there's a desperate little girl somewhere out there that needs help; a little girl who's in a dangerous situation— where *something* is being done to her. He'd had her in his arms and he'd still lost her.

She's out there, and he doesn't even know if he's allowed to say anything.

If he's allowed to *mention* it or tell his guardians why the day was really so upsetting.

This is suffocating, but he can't say anything who doesn't already know, or seek comfort and conversation because that's a breach of Agency confidentiality. He's supposed to just... shoulder this alone; the circle of knowledge is small and Izuku knows he can't break it.

Izuku can't afford to dig himself any further into a hole when it comes to Sir Nighteye, but he also can't imagine suffering through this and not being able to even talk about it.

How are Heroes supposed to do this? How are *people* supposed to do this?

Izuku startles when a hand touches his shoulder. He knows he probably shouldn't— he's in a locked apartment with his two Hero guardians, but he's just so lost in thought that it happens.

His water sloshes as he jumps but doesn't spill.

He barely has a second to turn and see which guardian is with him when a blur of black hair (Shota, then) is rounding the couch and pulling him into a hug. Izuku awkwardly clutches the water as he melts into the embrace so easily.

He doesn't know how both his guardians have the power to make him feel so at ease.

"That was Centipeder on the phone," Shota tells him softly, "he was

calling to let me know that the raid on the Shie Hassaikai group has been moved up due to unforeseen circumstances. Apparently two student interns accidentally made contact with the target and discovered that Chisaki has a *child* with him. It's crucial we raid as soon as possible."

And the tears are back.

He knows.

Shota knows about Eri.

"She was so s-sc-scared," Izuku clutches the water to his chest with one hand and swings the other to desperately clutch at Shota. He buries his face in the man's neck as the poorly constructed dam of his emotions crumbles down, fingers clasped around a bundle of coiled capture weapon, "we couldn't help her—I-I *tried*, b-but—"

"You did the right thing," Shota shushes, settling his chin on the top of Izuku's head, "you did everything right. I'm so sorry you had to leave her, Izuku, I'm so sorry. You helped her just by finding her. We *know* she exists now and because of you and Togata, finding her and bringing her to safety is now top priority. We'll rescue her. We will do everything in our power to rescue her."

It's like a weight off his shoulders that Shota is saying this. Shota knows what he'd done, about the patrol, and the little girl, and how they'd just let Chisaki take her away, and he's telling him it's okay. He knows, and he's providing targeting empathy.

He's so grateful that Hizashi had managed to calm him down, that even when he hadn't known what had Izuku so worked up, he'd still just let the emotions run their course and offered his presence as comfort, but this was exactly what Izuku needed to hear.

He needed someone to know what he did—he needed someone to tell him it would work out.

He clutches at his guardian for a while—long enough that Shota had sunk to a crouch and Izuku is hanging off his guardian with just his legs as an anchor to the couch. Shota makes no move to pull away either; his grip just as strong and comforting as Hizashi, but he knows.

Izuku sniffles, "I didn't know you were supposed to be a part of the raid..."

Shota lets out a soft laugh, mouth buried in Izuku's curls. "I was one of the first contacted about it. Erasure is a valuable Quirk to have in a raid when you don't know exact numbers or Quirks of your target. The yakuza is dangerous as is, and Shie Hassaiaki is even more so now that Chisaki has taken control. The Quirks we do know of are dangerous, and it was already high priority before you and Togata found the little girl."

Izuku nods, cheek pressing against Shota's chest. "We'll save her, right? I can't... I can't let her down again. She needs help."

"You can't make promises in Heroics; there are too many unknowns, and there are so many ways something could go wrong," Shota tells Izuku slowly, pulling away and catching Izuku's chin until they have eye contact, "but we will try our damnedest to save that little girl, and that's a promise I can make."

The day of the raid arrives faster than Izuku could've imagined. Sir Nighteye really had made it a priority now that Eri's safety was on the line.

It's an early morning of preparation. The teams arrive at Nighteye Agency—Shota, Fatgum, Ryukyu, as well as their interns and various other Heroes participating. Izuku is more relieved than he'd care to admit seeing Uraraka, Kirishima and Asui accompanying their respective mentors, and he's glad to see the rest of Yuuei's 'Big Three' there too. Izuku can see relief similar to Izuku's own in Togata-Senpai's gaze when he smiles at his two friends.

It's nice to know there will be people to talk to, friends who know exactly what he's going though being a part of the same raid. He doesn't feel as isolated anymore, even if he does know more about Eri than everyone else does.

Oboro is with them, standing shoulder to shoulder with Izuku through the briefing. The raid is set to happen in the afternoon, so there's still a couple hours until then.

The morning is spent going over the plan. The teams are getting assigned different jobs, and if they want everything to run smoothly, everyone needs to be on top of what they're meant to be doing.

After they run through the plan a few times, the students are dismissed for lunch.

Izuku hates leaving and knows the adults will be talking more in depth, but a sideways look from Sir Nighteye has him following the rest of the students out the door.

Oboro promises to listen in on the conversation and keep him in the loop.

Nothing interesting happens besides more in depth talk and some of the other Heroes question if the students are reliable enough to participate in such a consequential raid considering four of seven students are first years who're not even a week into their work studies.

By the time the actual raid arrives, everyone ready to storm into the Shie Hassaikai hideout, Izuku is antsy to go. He's nervous and worried and he's hopeful they'll find the little girl in one piece.

He hasn't seen any sign of the ghost children.

He knows they don't know about the raid, but he still makes him worried.

Are they alright? Is Eri alright? Will there be even more ghosts? Less of them? Did Chisaki do something to her after they met as a punishment for trying to escape? He hates the thought. And he hates even more that it very well could've happened.

Izuku sticks close to Shota on the raid; or maybe Shota sticks close to him. He isn't really sure. His guardian isn't far behind him. Oboro hangs around too, watching the group and lingering close to Izuku in case they need the Quirk.

It's risky considering Shota's here too, but Izuku will do whatever it takes to make sure Eri is safe—even if that means throwing himself under the bus.

The group moves swiftly down the hall, keeping close together and prepared for anything.

Izuku is on high alert, looking round for any danger.

He's so focused that he hardly notices the presence.

"You came," Izuku whips his head in the direction of the small voice. He turns to see Eri. One of the Eri ghosts. He thinks... it's the one who'd talked to him; who'd hung back behind the other ghosts, Eri

and Chisaki just... she's *faded*. "We knew you would. You'll help her, right?"

Izuku manages a little nod, bottom lip sucked in between his teeth.

The ghost doesn't look well—she's nearly completely translucent.

She'd been the strongest of the group so to see her like this... he squeezes his eyes shut. He doesn't know how echoes work—how long they last but it appears the end is near. He hopes they go to a place much better than this.

"What's happening to you?" Oboro asks softly, moving towards the girl. Izuku stays rooted in place, even as his team treks further down the hall. He has half a mind to follow them, but he won't abandon a little girl. Ghost or not.

"We fade," she explains softly, eyes downcast. "Overhaul's been busy so he hasn't had time to... to make anymore. To do anything to us. It's... I-I'm the only one now. You'll... you'll help her, won't you, Deku? You'll... stop him?"

"I will," Izuku croaks out under his breath. "I won't leave without you. Without Eri."

The ghost child nods, form flickering where she's stood. The ghost winces before looking up at him, eyes sparkling with determination. "She's in a room," the ghost explains, "there's, um, traps. In the hallway. Be careful. Overhaul's been worried about Heroes coming, even if he doesn't act like it. She's important to him. To... to his *work*. You gotta rescue her, Deku. It hurts so much."

"I'm so sorry," Izuku whispers to the child, dropping to his knees just in front of her like he'd done to Eri. "I'm sorry you're like this. I'm sorry you're fading. I won't let him do anything to Eri ever again, okay? You'll... you'll be okay."

The ghost shakes her head, flickering once again.

"I was just hoping to see you," the ghost says lightly, voice echoey. "I wanted to make sure you were coming and you did. I... don't need to stay now. You'll help her. You said so."

"I will," Izuku whispers, voice hoarse. It feels like he's watching this little girl die. He's never seen a ghost do this before. He hurts for her. "I'll make sure he never touches her again, okay? I promise you. You'll

be the last one."

She gives him a wobbly smile.

He watches her. He's not sure if she's in pain as she flickers. He's not sure where she'd going; what'll happen to her when she's... gone from their world. He hopes it doesn't hurt. That she'll be okay. Maybe even that she'll be reunited with all the other Eri echoes.

She fades before his eyes, almost like she blinks completely out of existence. She's there one second and the next she's just... gone. Izuku bites back a sob, feeling tears trickle down his cheeks.

He stares at the empty space, a hole in his heart. He's not sure he's ever hurt like this.

He couldn't help them.

It was silly to think he could save the ghost echoes.

H couldn't save them, but he sure as hell can save Eri.

And he will.

"Deku."

Izuku doesn't need to turn to know it's Shota who'd backtracked for him. He hears the tense worry and feels his guardian's eyes on him. Watching and taking the scene in. Izuku clenches his hands where they're in his lap, staring at the spot the child had been just seconds before.

"I thought I saw something," Izuku croaks out the excuse, dragging the sleeve of his costume over his eyes to mop up the tears. "Sorry, I didn't mean to fall behind, Eraserhead."

"It's fine," his guardian says stiffly, looking at where Izuku had been kneeled. "What did you see?"

"This place is booby-trapped. There was a panel in the wall it... it flipped around. Maybe motion censored?" Izuku drops his hands to his sides, anger for these echoes and that little girl alit in his stomach, "I think the whole hallway is, we have to be careful. Eri's being held somewhere down this hall—I-I know it— so we need to reach the end."

Shota eyes Izuku with a furrowed brow before nodding, "of course.

Let's catch up with everyone else and tell them what you found. Don't fall behind again."

"R-right," Izuku nods, glancing back at Oboro. The ghost stares at where the child had faded completely, seemingly lost in thought. Izuku shuffles back just enough to pinch the fabric of Oboro's Yuuei school uniform, offering a sad smile before gesturing the ghost on. "We have a little girl to save."

Eri is in the hospital for a couple days following the raid.

Izuku has been spending a lot of time at the hospital with the little girl, partly because he's concerned for her wellbeing and knows he's one of the familiar faces she knows, and partly because Shota had been given temporary custody of the small girl since he's the only one they have on hand who's able to cancel out her Quirk.

It wasn't just Eri admitted to the hospital—most of the Heroes and students on the raid were injured or hit by Quirks in Izuku's case. Shota was stitched up, but thankfully not admitted, and Izuku himself only had to spend a single night under observation due to continuously using Eri's Quirk as a means to fight well past his own physical capabilities.

He's sure Shota and Hizashi had more say about the observation than the doctors at the hospital had, but he doesn't complain or argue. He can see the worry in their eyes when he tries to assure them that he's *fine*, but ultimately caves for their sake.

Fatgum, Kirishima and Amajiki are all admitted overnight, and Uraraka, Asui, Hado and Ryukyu spend the remainder if the day after the raid at the hospital as well.

Togata-Senpai spends a couple days hospital bound, and everyone tries to come to terms with the fact that Sir Nighteye was lost during the raid. Izuku doesn't have good memories of the man, nothing like his Sidekicks, or Togata-Senpai have with the man, but he's still devastated. He really was a good Hero, even if he didn't like Izuku.

Izuku doesn't mind spending his time at the hospital— it's frankly better being the visitor than it is being the patient, but he'd gladly switch places with Eri if he was able to. She looks tiny in the hospital bed—spending most of her time sleeping.

They're in Eri's room now, down in the pediatric ward.

Eri is asleep, considering Togata-Senpai had just left with his father. She always seems to perk up when they're both in the room, and it's always a treat compared to the blankness the child usually wears.

The little girl has been searching out Izuku and Togata both, seeking comfort in them. Izuku isn't sure if it's because they're the first Heroes she'd met, or because they were the ones to reach her in the end. The ones who came through, start to finish.

He doesn't mind in the slightest and is glad to provide comfort to her.

Shota and Hizashi are both in the room as well.

Eri had warmed up to Shota quickly, and Hizashi shortly after that.

Shota was one of the faces she saw during the raid, and he'd been the one to turn her Quirk off before she could accidentally hurt anyone. She hadn't been very wary of him when she'd woken up in the hospital, but she had instantly searched Izuku out, who'd been silently waiting across the room.

Hizashi is just a genuinely kind man who'd also been there when she woke up. He hadn't been in his Hero costume, but he'd soften like Izuku remember the man doing for him as well when he'd first been brought back to his guardian's apartment all those months ago.

Honestly, Izuku would be concerned if Eri didn't warm up to Hizashi.

Izuku is sitting in the hospital chair by Eri's bed now, knees pulled up and heels supporting himself on the edge of the seat. He uses his thighs as a flat surface to write in his notebook, listening to the soft breaths of the little girl and his guardians chatting quietly across the room.

He's half listening and half focused on analyzing some of the Quirks he'd seen during the raid. He isn't really eavesdropping on his guardians, just keeping an ear on their conversation. He doesn't even react until he's looking up in surprise as what they're talking about finally pieces into place.

"I'll stay in the teacher's dorms with her," Izuku hears Shota say. They're talking quietly between them, so Izuku isn't sure if he meant to hear, but he does. "More room down there, and it can't help to have the other teachers around. We'll look into something more permanent when she's a bit more comfortable with us."

The teen pauses in his writing, looking up at them in surprise. “What?”

Hizashi swirls around to face Izuku, eyebrows furrowed in his own surprise, “what?”

Shota glances over too, frowning in silent question.

“Why... why would you and Eri stay in the teacher’s dorms?”

Shota blinks, taking in the question before cocking his head, “I’m her temporary guardian,” the man says carefully, eyeing Izuku, “she’ll be staying with me until we can arrange a more permanent guardian, or until she learns to control her Quirk. That’s twenty-four seven, Problem Child. We don’t have room to house a little girl in the apartment, and all the dorms in our building are full as well.”

“There’s room,” Izuku blinks in confusion, “there’s a bedroom in the apartment.”

“Uh... there’s no spare room in the apartment,” Hizashi says slowly as he and Shota share a confused look, “what are you talking about, Sunshine?”

“The spare room,” Izuku lets his feet slip off the chair, notebook lowering to his knees, “the one I sleep in when I stay upstairs with you guys. Eri can sleep in there, up in the apartment with you guys. Then no one has to go anywhere.”

“That’s your room,” Shota’s frown deepens as he narrows his eyes at Izuku, “I don’t think so, Problem Child.”

“It’s a spare room,” Izuku insists, flipping his book closed and leaning forwards anxiously, “I rarely even sleep up there. I can take my stuff out and bring it down to my dorm and it’ll just be another spare room, right? There’s no reason I need to have two rooms, is there? She needs a room, and Shota shouldn’t have to leave his own apartment, and I know the class would greatly prefer knowing you’re upstairs...”

“That’s your space though, Sunshine,” Hizashi’s tone is cautious, like he’s talking to a spooked animal or something. Shota and Hizashi share another look that Izuku doesn’t both trying to decipher, and he even feels Oboro’s gaze on him from across the room where the ghost had been quietly observing.

Izuku doesn’t understand. This seems like the most logical course of

action. There's a room in the apartment that's hardly ever used— why wouldn't they move Eri in when she needs the space?

"I don't need it though," Izuku counters logically, "I don't even need to spend time upstairs. I have everything I need down in the dorms, and it makes sense that I'd just stay downstairs with my class when someone else needs the room more than I do, right? It's a guest room."

"It's *your* room, not a guest room," Shota replies lowly, not unkindly. "It's yours, it was added into the layout of the building with you specifically in mind. That room in the apartment is yours, and we're not going to take that away just because someone else *could* use it."

"But I don't mind," Izuku frowns now.

Why aren't they just agreeing—if he took his stuff out of the room it would just be a spare, right? It's not like he needs to be up in the apartment with his guardians, not like how Eri needs to be close to Shota right now. She obviously needs them; shouldn't that be priority?

"Just because you don't mind giving up your room, doesn't mean it's right for us to ask that of you," Hizashi tells him softly, "it's your room. Your space. The apartment is your home too. We like knowing that there's somewhere for you to stay, your own space just for you, when you're up in the apartment."

"But Eri needs somewhere to stay," Izuku tells them, "and... and I don't want to put Shota out when there's a perfectly good bedroom in the apartment. We all like knowing he's upstairs when we need him, especially after everything. The class shouldn't have to suffer because I'm being greedy with the room. Plus, I sleep in my dorm most of the time. Eri needs the space, and I don't mind. Isn't that the most logical thing to do?"

"You're not really seeing where they're coming from," Oboro comments lightly from across the room, and a quick glance over tells him the ghost looks unimpressed. It's that look he always gets when something his guardians are saying or doing goes straight over his head.

When he doesn't understand something everyone else seems to understand.

"It's not greedy," Shota sighs heavily. "It's your space, Problem Child. We understand that you don't mind offering up your room for Eri to borrow, but we aren't going to take something that's *yours* away from

you even if it seems logical to you. You know how much I like logic, so understand that doing that wouldn't be logical to us. We won't be taking your room away from you so Eri can use it. It's yours."

A *'why?'* sits on the tip of Izuku's tongue, but he feels like this is a losing battle. They're insistent, and the more he keeps pushing and assuring that he doesn't mind, and he really doesn't, the more it seems his guardians are getting upset. He doesn't understand.

He hardly ever uses the room— and none of his peers have a second room on school grounds. It's not like anyone else (besides Hitoshi) even has the luxury of seeing their guardians and family on a day-to-day basis. Izuku's lucky his guardians live above the dorms and that there's a place for him to go.

Still, if he's not using the room very often and Eri could be using it, wouldn't it make more sense to just let her have it? No one would be put out; Shota wouldn't have to sleep in the teacher's dorms, and Eri would have a safe space to sleep. It's not like she's taking *his* bed; and even if she were, he'd gladly give it up.

"We're not going to take something that's yours away from you for an indefinite amount of time," Shota explains easily when Izuku doesn't say anything else. "That doesn't sit right with either of us, and we're not going to take it from you just because it sounds easiest. I know you say you don't mind, and I believe you, but it's not something either Hizashi or I think is fair or are comfortable doing. Your room is your space. Eri needs somewhere to stay, her own space, but it shouldn't have to be your space."

Izuku bites his bottom lip, accepting defeat.

It doesn't feel like he'll be getting anywhere with this.

It still doesn't feel right though.

"We'll figure something out that doesn't involve you giving up your room in your home away from home," Hizashi strolls across the room, ruffling his fingers through Izuku's curls when he gets close enough to do so. "We spend a lot of time there, and Sho and I like that you get a break from your dorm just like everyone else, even if we can't always go home to the off-campus apartment, ya'dig?"

"What about Eri?" Izuku asks, eyes flicking away from Hizashi and towards the child.

She's still asleep, and if anyone deserves to sleep to their heart's content, it's Eri.

"We'll figure something out, Problem Child," Shota echoes Hizashi's own words gently, his eyes flicking towards the little girl too, "we'll figure something out that works for everyone. No one's going to be stepping on anyone's toes— there are ways to go about this without anyone having to give anything up. Just let Hizashi and I sort this out, okay?"

"Okay," Izuku nods slowly. He tears his gaze from the sleeping girl and looks between his guardians.

Eri is the last person discharged from the hospital.

She's released into Shota's care a couple days after Togata is released. She was in the hospital for a little under a week— fighting malnutrition, dehydration, Quirk exhaustion and regular exhaustion as well. Ove the week she went through extensive screenings and medical tests to determine her health after being in the hands of a villain for so long, and was healed by a couple different Quirks, but there was a lot of damage done to the poor thing, and her scars are proof of that.

They may never know just what Chisaki did to the little girl, but everyone can agree that it had to of been horrific. Doctors and specialists had all agreed that what Eri had been through was traumatic, and that the physical scars were just the tip of the ice burg into that trauma.

Izuku seems insistent of that as well, well before the doctors had determined just what Eri had been through. From the start he'd seemed too in tune with Eri's needs and comfort. They'd known him long enough to know he's a genuinely kind and empathetic kid, but this seems a bit too... personal.

They'd very quickly bonded, maybe even past how Togata had bonded with the little girl. Eri was definitely quite fond of Togata, but she just seemed... different with Izuku.

There was just something about how Izuku spoke to the girl; seemed to know exactly how to calm her.

It was like he was always two steps ahead of everyone else when it came to Eri, and Shota wasn't sure why. It was nice to see, adorable

even, but it was also odd.

Even when Eri was released from the hospital— she'd been ecstatic to find both Izuku and Togata waiting with Hizashi. She'd instantly run towards Izuku, and he's been quick to pick her up and twirl her into a hug. She'd been so happy, the happiest the little girl had appeared in the entire time she'd been in the hospital, even if she hadn't cracked a single smile, to see both of them.

It was clear how excited she was to see both, going on about LeMillion and Deku, but it was obvious she wanted to be close to Izuku.

Shota understood this; the two teens clearly provided a little bit of familiarity.

He knows Izuku had been the first to really interact with the child, and it was a common thing when it came to victims and the Heroes that saved them; especially children rescued from environments like a yakuza homebase. Eri was just a child and Izuku and Togata were the two people who came through and saved her.

The little girl had slowly warmed up to him as well though, and Hizashi to a degree too, in her time in the hospital, but it's obvious the child has taken an immediate liking to the two teenagers.

And they've clearly taken a liking to the little girl too.

Shota had been spending his time at the hospital, keeping an eye on her and watching over her in case she accidentally started using her Quirk. No one blamed the small child for lack of Quirk control, but it was better to have an Erasure Quirk on hand to make sure nothing got out of hand.

Eri had only lost control of her Quirk twice in her whole hospital stay, but she had managed to rewind a doctor a year or so back, and the second time Shota had cut it off before any damage could be done.

Shota has been near constantly with the little girl while Hizashi has been watching over 1-A and bringing Izuku in to visit. After Togata was released from the hospital, he too could be found hovering with their foster son. It was rare to see Hizashi arrive at the hospital with just Izuku, and even rarer to see his husband coming alone without the two teenagers.

Eri spends most of her time sleeping, which is good. She'd greatly overused her Quirk when she'd constantly used it when she was

healing Izuku while the teenager had been fighting Chisaki.

Shota's almost glad he hadn't been there to see that in its entirety, because he's almost certain he would've tried to Erase someone's Quirk and that... well, erasing anyone's but Chisaki's could've been dangerous considering how the teen and child were feeding off of each other's Quirks.

One wrong move and Izuku and Eri could've plummeted from the sky, or Rewind could've gotten out of hand and rewound Izuku too far back when her energy wasn't being channeled into something.

It's been just a couple days since Eri was released from the hospital.

A lot of the students are still at their internships, some even spending the full duration of their internships in other towns living with hosts, so it's not hard to introduce Eri to the dorms. Normally he'd be worried about over stimulating her with all his rowdy students, but the only ones actually in the dorms full time right now are the students who were a part of the raid, which, for the most part, are people Eri has at least seen on the scene of her rescue.

The students who were a part of the raid had been given some time to recuperate, which Shota is grateful for since he couldn't imagine expecting these *children* to be okay to just return to their internships after an intensive raid and rescue mission. Their first real missions, mind you. A raid that not a single person returned from unscathed; Heroes and students alike. A raid that a Pro Hero died in.

There's been talk of bringing the first portion of the internships to an end for now, and Shota couldn't agree more with the notion. He just wants all the kids back safe and sound right now. There will be more internships, but there's a lot he wants to teach them before that.

He's proud of how the students had acted and reacted during the raid, but there's still more to teach.

For now he's just glad to have those who'd been a part of the raid safe in their dorms.

The man lets out a sigh, leaning back in his chair.

They're in the teacher's dorms, and Shota's trying to get some work done. Eri's on the couch in their common area, the television tuned into a children's show Izuku introduced her to in the days since she'd been released from the hospital.

The small girl had been completely enthralled by the program, and since Shota has work he can be doing, he'd decided to let her enjoy herself.

He's not alone— Nemuri and Hizashi are here with him, and Thirteen is sitting on the couch behind Eri, watching along too.

His guardianship over Eri has been going well. She hadn't had any Quirk accidents— terrified to use her Quirk at all. It's amazing that her control hasn't slipped at all since she'd been released. It's stressful and a new setting for her; usual things that tend to send children spiraling. He hasn't pushed on the topic of her Quirk. Not yet at least.

Izuku had taken to the small girl even more than Shota and Hizashi had assumed he would. He'd accepted the roll of 'older sibling' without much thought, and Eri had followed suit. She's taken to calling him '*zuku-nii*' in the days they'd known each other. It had been *Deku-nii* first, but Hizashi had been quick to correct her. Hizashi really does hate the Hero name Deku.

They hadn't managed to find a sleeping arrangement that worked in favor for everyone. Izuku had brought up the interesting point that 1-A liked having Shota in the building with them, and he can't even complain because he's most at ease when he knows all twenty of his kids are safe downstairs.

That said, he and Hizashi also hadn't caved on the bedroom dispute. It was upsetting how fast Izuku was willing to give up his room when he deemed someone else more worthy. Shota had thought they were making progress with the kid, but maybe they hadn't made as much as he'd thought.

It doesn't sit right with him that Izuku is always so willing to make someone else comfortable, even if it's at the cost of his own comfort.

Izuku and Eri had ended up sleeping in the living room in the apartment, usually with Shota crashing on the couch behind them. They'd laid out a futon that Hizashi had thought to grab from the off-campus apartment on their way in from the hospital, and Izuku had been more than happy to hang around the little girl.

It had worked, but Shota knows they can't keep sleeping on the floor in the living room, and if no one can compromise about staying in the teachers dorms, or letting Eri have Izuku room in the apartment, he's not sure what'll happen.

He isn't even sure if this is healthy for Izuku— he hadn't been pulling away exactly, but he had been distancing himself when he thinks Eri should have their full attention. They'd just gotten Izuku accustomed to the idea of having attentive guardians, and now he's stepping away from the idea because Eri obviously also needs a guardian.

Shota hates it.

This is what he didn't want to happen; why he'd been hesitant about taking on the role of caretaker for the little girl. Izuku just isn't at a place where he knows how to accept sharing attention. His go to is to hand over everything when he thinks someone else needs it more— in this case, stepping back from his guardians because he believes Eri needs them more than he does.

"Why're you so glare-y?" A finger pointed finger pokes the side of his head, and Nemuri's curious purr has him turning his glare in her direction. "Thinking about your son again? Or your ward?"

Shota glances over at where Eri is still staring wide-eyed at the television. Thirteen now just looks confused as the show progresses.

"I'm not glaring," Shota huffs, glaring at his friend, "and it's none of your business."

"We're worried," Hizashi says quietly, "about Izuku."

"About Izuku? Why?" Nemuri blinks in surprise, leaning back in her chair so she can see Eri. The little girl bounces where she's sitting as an upbeat theme song plays. How many episodes has she watched now? "Green-Bean not liking sharing the attention of dad and dad? I never pegged the kid as a jealous type."

"It's the opposite actually," Hizashi sighs, rubbing at the back of his neck. "He's... I don't know, withdrawing himself? He loves Eri, don't get me wrong, but he's sorta distancing himself from us because he thinks we should be focusing on her more. We're worried."

"He's sensitive," Shota sighs, figuring there's no easy way out of this conversation Hizashi had just gotten them into. "After his mother, I think he believes himself to be the disposable one. That we'll get tired of him or... replace him. He's always tried to keep himself at arm's length but recently he's been... making progress, I suppose."

"Yeah," Hizashi agrees with a soft look, "I know he doesn't think we're replacing him, but subconsciously... I don't know. His mom

really messed with his head. He's gotten comfortable, but I think seeing us interact with Eri, her needing us too... I think he's going to pull away so he doesn't get in the way."

"That's not good," Nemuri frowns, and Shota's glad to see the tease has left her tone and expression. "Have you guys tried talking to him? The 'we love you and nothing will ever change that, not even a new baby' stuff?"

"He's our baby," Hizashi huffs. "Nothing will change that."

"My point exactly," Nemuri deadpans with a fond smile. "It's adorable how weak for that kid you two are. He's really part of the family now, huh? My legit nephew— I mean I teased him about it when I came around your place for Shirakumo's birthday, but I really am Auntie Nem, aren't I?"

"He is," Shota doesn't bother trying to say anything else, "he just hasn't come to the same conclusion yet and I doubt he will if he keeps pulling away because he thinks we're going to replace him with Eri. And don't make him call you that, you'll embarrass him. We're trying to bring him out of his shell, not shove him back in with. Don't move to fast."

"And you don't get to be Auntie Nem until we're *Dad* and *Pa*. I refuse! It would be like our baby saying 'mama' first when he's got two gay dads. Totally uncool." Hizashi pouts, arms crossing over his chest.

"Hizashi," Shota warns drily, "he'll come around when he's ready; stop pouting. You know he's skittish, you're still riding the high of him calling you Pa in the hospital while drugged. He doesn't remember that."

"It was still adorable, and I'll never forget it." Hizashi slumps in his seat, defeated. "I wish I had've been recording. I'll literally die when he calls me Pa again, I can't wait to be that for him. I know how parents feel when their babies first start talking now— I bet he'll call me Pa again before he calls you Dad, Sho."

"I don't know," Nemuri shakes her head, "Shota's the homeroom teacher. I've heard some of the other 1-A kids call him *Dadzawa*—"

"They call me *what*?"

"—so it feels like he'll slip up and call him Dad at some point."

Shota stares exasperated between his husband and friend, “no one’s *betting* on Izuku. He’ll call us whatever he feels comfortable with. The both of you are unbearable. Can we get back to the matter on hand? Our kid literally convincing himself someone else needs us more than he thinks he does so the best thing for him to do is to remove himself from the situations?”

Shota pauses, looking between the two who look like scolded puppies. He rubs at his eyes and sighs, “and how does it always feel like we’re back in high school whenever you two are together?”

“That,” Nemuri points to Shota with an impressed expression, “is totally why the green-bean will call him dad first.”

Hizashi pouts but doesn’t refute.

Shota doesn’t know if he should take that as a win or a loss.

“I get what you guys are saying though,” Nemuri’s tone is serious once again, conversation back on the rails. “Midoriya’s never struck me as a confident kid. I mean we all saw him during the entrance exam— willing to break his own body for Uraraka’s sake. He’s got, like, no self-preservation skills, so it’s no surprise that that branches to his home life too. You’re probably right he wouldn’t do well with a sibling, as much as he adores Eri.”

“I mean, it isn’t even just Izuku either. I don’t even know if we can handle another kid,” Hizashi looks towards the ceiling, “we’re already so busy, and truthfully, I don’t even know if we’re giving Izuku the attention he needs. Eri’s still so young, and between all our jobs, Shota working nights a lot of the time and Izuku, I just don’t think it’ll fall into place, ya’dig?”

“Children require a lot,” Shota agrees, biting his bottom lip. “I have 1-A to be dealing with, and I know Eri was placed with me because of her Quirk, but I just don’t know if I’ll have time to really be a parent to her. Not like she’ll need. Hizashi’s right; we are busy. Izuku’s a teenager and there’s still times we don’t see him besides class. That’s no way for a child to live. And until Izuku is in a good place, a place where he knows that he’s important to us, I don’t think we should be doing anything that could deter his progress.”

“I agree,” Hizashi says softly, like he doesn’t want to admit it. “Eri is a wonderful little girl, but we need to put Izuku first. I don’t want him pulling away from us— he's finally getting comfortable with us. I... don’t want to ruin it.”

Shota dry washes his face with his hands, sighing into his palms.

“Y’know I’ve taken a bit of a step back from my Agency,” Nemuri says without looking up, “I’ve been thinking about putting my own fostering license to good use, and since we moved into the dorms, I’ve had a lot of spare time. Plus, there’s the spare bedroom in my apartment in the 2-GenEd class...”

“And?” Shota drawls, lifting his face from his hands and arching an eyebrow.

The woman slaps him on the shoulder, “you know exactly what I’m getting at, Shota. The little munchkin is adorable. She needs somewhere to be, and I have the space and time. Plus, it’s only a five-minute walk from my dorms to yours, so if something did happen, a Quirk accident or something, you could be here in minutes. And she’ll still be close for Togata and Green-bean to spoil. Doesn’t that check all the boxes?”

“You’re really serious about fostering?” Hizashi cocks his head to the side.

Nemuri had gotten her license around the same time they did, but she’d never really used it. No more than Shota and Hizashi did when something arose at school, not like when they’d gotten and fallen in love with Izuku. Nemuri had been a good foster parent, but nothing had stuck and she’d liked her freedom when she was younger.

“What about your wild love life?” Shota asks slowly.

“I live on a school campus,” Nemuri deadpans, arms crossing over her chest. “My love life isn’t exactly *flourishing* at the moment. And it’s not like having a kid is a prison sentence; I’ll still be able to get out sometimes. She’ll have two uncles who’ll love to babysit, and a cousin who adores her. Not to mention the rest of the students who’ve taken a shine to her already, like Togata. I think I’d be able to find someone to babysit every so often when the *need* arises, if you catch my drift.”

“Gross,” Shota scrunches his face up.

Hizashi snorts a laugh into his fist.

Still, Shota can’t argue with Nemuri’s logic on this one. It does check all the boxes, “if you’re sure about this we’ll need to talk with Nezu first. And We’ll need to officially transfer her from my care to your care. I don’t mind being her secondary guardian still, I just... I need to

put my kid first before thinking of another.”

“You’re adorable, Shota,” Nemuri coos, leaning over to throw an arm over his shoulders. He thinks, for a second, about ducking out of it, but then he’d be risking getting tackled. “I’m sure about this. We’ll jump through whatever hoops, right? I’ve always wanted kids, y’know? I’ve wanted kids, and here’s one who needs a home. And it’s better for everyone if she’s close, so I think it’s a no brainer.”

Shota thinks it over for just one more second before bowing his head in a nod, “alright.”

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully you liked this chapter, and sorry it came off as a bit rushed! I really just wanted to get Eri into the story because I think I can write some fun stuff with that! Also, it's almost 1AM as I type this and I'm tired, so apologies if it's not as smooth, or as well edited. After Christmas I will go over these chapter again when I'm not dead tired lol.

Anyways! As always, comments are greatly appreciated! I love reading them all, and I'm so incredibly grateful for each and every one of you readers! <3

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Hey, hey! Look! We hit chapter 40!

I'm so sorry it's been so long-- I'd planned to have a third, Christmas chapter ready for Christmas since there's Christmas in the actual anime, but halfway through that I realized it wouldn't make sense plot wise. Fear not, there will be a fluffy Christmas chapter at some point, just not yet!

Anyways, with that out of the way, enjoy the next part!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is in the spare room up in the on-campus apartment when his guardians return home.

He's loading up what little belongings he keeps in the guest room upstairs to take down to his dorm room. He knows his guardians have said they aren't going to give Eri the spare room upstairs, but it still doesn't make sense to him.

They'd been sleeping in the living room on futons since the little girl had been released from the hospital. Wouldn't it just be easier if Izuku was downstairs with everyone else where he's *supposed* to be instead of up in the living room? It defeats the purpose of the spare room when no one's using it. He could sleep downstairs, and Eri could take the spare room and then Shota and Hizashi would both be good to return to their bedroom as well.

Simple.

Izuku grabs the last book off his desk, the newest book he'd borrowed from the library for Oboro. This one's a mystery novel, which the ghost had been bouncing on his heels over when he'd spotted the title on the spine of the book nestled in the shelf.

Oboro himself is watching with a sour look, perched on the edge of the bed.

"I don't understand why you're so insistent you give up your room," the ghost sighs, leaning back against outstretched arms. He's pouting, but Izuku chooses not to look over and acknowledge it. "You know

they're not going to like this, right?"

"Eri needs somewhere to sleep," Izuku mutters, turning to set the book in the box beside Oboro, "she's sleeping on a futon in the living room, Oboro, that's no way for a little girl to live. She's been held captive and abused—tortured— she needs her own safe space."

"And that safe space needs to be yours?"

"I don't need three bedrooms," Izuku shakes his head. "I don't get what the big deal is. I hardly sleep up here anyways. I don't need this room, it's a spare. Someone else can use it more than I do, so what's the problem? You put guests in spare rooms. Eri is a guest, and she needs the room."

"It's not a spare, it's yours."

"That I hardly use," Izuku refutes with a blank expression. "That practically makes it a spare."

"What about when your classmates go home for the weekend? What about holidays? You come up here when Sho and 'zashi can't leave campus. Where will you sleep when that happens if Eri takes your room."

"In my dorm," Izuku furrows his brow in confusion, "isn't that obvious?"

"Alone? When the rest of your peers are home with their guardians and families?" The ghost looks upset for some reason. Izuku doesn't really understand. "You don't see how that's wrong? Why they're worried about this— about *you*?"

"No," Izuku admits honestly. "Everyone will have a bed, and Eri will be close when she needs them. They'll help her like they did me. She needs people she can trust, adults she can trust, and Shota and Hizashi can be that for her. I'm a big boy, Oboro, I can sleep in the dorms by myself. Besides, it's not like they're *haunted* or anything. And if we're being honest, you're usually where I am at night unless Shota is on patrol or something. I'll be fine."

The ghost's lips twitch up in a smile before he forces the expression into a pout, "don't use humor as a distraction. You're separating yourself from them."

"I am not," Izuku rolls his eyes, as he finally moves to the bed,

grabbing the pawprint pillow and tiny green cat toy from the arcade and setting them both in the box as well. “I’m being logical and finding a solution to a problem. They’re my teachers, it’s not like I could separate myself from them even if I did try. I see Shota in homeroom every morning, and he’s still the Heroics teachers which is all afternoon, and I have English with Hizashi for an hour every morning. How is that pulling away?”

“I swear, sometimes you sound *just* like Shota. Listen, you’re not pulling away from your *teachers*, ‘zuku, you’re pulling away from your *guardians*,” the ghost interjects, heaving a sigh as he pushes himself back up, straightening his arched spine as he regards the teenager with narrowed eyes. “There’s a difference— one that I don’t think you understand.”

Izuku scrunches his face up as he processes the words, before shrugging.

It makes sense, but still, he’s not pulling away. He’ll only be a couple floors away. It’s not like he’s moving buildings, or towns away.

And they’ll need to focus on Eri, not him. He doesn’t want to be a distraction, so it’s probably for the best anyways. She’s still so young, and she’s gone through something traumatic.

“Why are we even arguing about this?” Izuku sighs, “this makes the most sense, and I know Shota and Hizashi don’t agree, but it *does* make the most sense. Like I said, once all this stuff is gone, it’s just a normal spare room again. I’ll just bring it all downstairs and then it’s not mine anymore. No problem.”

“Um, yes problem! We’re arguing over this because you’re being *dense* and you can’t see what’s right in front of you!” the ghost huffs out, arms crossing over his chest. “You seem to think that it’s best for everyone if you just step back, but you’re the only one who thinks that. Have you ever stopped to think that there may be a reason they’re not backing down?”

“And what reason might that be?” Izuku challenges, crossing his own arms over his chest and matching the ghost’s stance. “Everyone keeps saying no, but no one’s explaining why it’s so wrong!”

“It’s your room,” the ghost tells him once again, suddenly sounding so defeated.

His arms drop to his sides like all his energy has been sapped out of

his body. Izuku hesitates for a second before matching the ghost's body language once again.

The ghost frowns down at his hands before looking up at Izuku once more, "you're giving something that's yours up so easily because you think Eri needs it. And listen, I don't disagree. I know exactly what you know, remember? She needs somewhere she feels safe. She needs someone to take care of her. No one is arguing that. Just... why does it have to be *your* space? Why are you so *quick* to give it all up?"

"She needs it," Izuku frowns.

"But why is her comfort more important than your own?" Oboro asks quietly, watching Izuku out of the corner of his eye. "Why is she more deserving of the room— of Shota and Hizashi? Why won't you settle for a compromise somewhere? They're trying to find a solution where no one's put out. You're just a kid yourself, Izuku, why are you forcing yourself out of the equation when they're trying to rearrange it so everyone gets what they need?"

Izuku pauses at that. He peers over at the box on the bed, frowning at the green cat ears poking out over the edge of the box.

"I don't need them like Eri does."

Izuku doesn't look at the ghost. Doesn't want to see the ghost's face.

"That's bullshit," Oboro snaps, dragging tense fingers up through cloudy blue locks. "You're doing it again, man. You're such a self-sacrificer, you know that? Taking everyone else's lives into account except for your own. Making it easier for everyone but *you*. You're allowed to need them even if someone else needs them too. You're allowed to *want* them even if there's nothing you *need* them for.

"You're allowed to want to keep your room even if someone else *could* use it. You're allowed to have more than one bedroom so you get the support and comfort you need just like your classmates when they return home. You're allowed to want selfish things when it comes to your own comfort— to your guardians, your *family*."

Izuku's heart thumps in his chest, and he's not sure why, for a full second, it feels like he can't breathe.

A small part of him is hanging onto Oboro's words with a bone-white grip, while the bigger part of him is whispering that he's overreacting. That Oboro's overreacting. Right now, Eri should be the focus. Not

him.

“I know that,” Izuku tells him almost numbly. He silently questions if he *does* really know that. “But I’m still going to do whatever I can to make this easier for everyone. It’s not just me I’m thinking about. I’m thinking about everyone. Eri, Shota, Hizashi— even the rest of my class. This is best for everyone. I won’t be selfish. Not about this.”

Oboro opens his mouth to interject, but Izuku continues before the ghost has a chance, “after everything she went through, Eri needs all the help she can get, and no one wants Shota staying somewhere else when he could be staying here. My comfort isn’t worth disrupting everyone else, and, like I said, I don’t mind. I can’t be selfish. Not now.”

The ghost stares for a long second before tipping backwards until he plops down on the edge of the perfectly made bed. It’s a good thing Oboro has no weight, so the blankets don’t crinkle.

Oboro looks defeated once again, frowning hard. There’s a sadness in his eyes that Izuku doesn’t really understand, but it’s gone with the following sigh, “you know they’re going to hate this, right?”

“That’s why I’m moving my stuff while they’re gone. They can’t stop me if they don’t know, and there’s not much they can do when I’m already downstairs. I doubt they’ll even notice,” Izuku informs, finally letting the conversation drop.

“You sound like you’re running away,” Oboro tells him blandly, eyes tracking Izuku’s movements as the teen grabs the last couple trinkets he has around the room. Seeing everything he owns packed away into one box brings up unpleasant memories of leaving his childhood home, but he shoves the feeling down.

Izuku doesn’t bother replying to Oboro’s comment as he steps towards the bed and grabs the box easily. He sweeps his eyes over the room again, looking for anything he could’ve missed, but doesn’t find anything. Finally, he steps towards the bedroom door, lingering for a second as he glances back at the frowning ghost. “It’s better for everyone, y’know?”

“If you say so,” the ghost bemoans, clearly not in agreement. Still, Oboro pushes himself up off the sheets and trails along after Izuku. Izuku somehow manages to open the bedroom door, even with his hands full of box.

He knows Oboro could've helped; with all the practice he's had at this point, a doorknob is no challenge for him anymore, especially not with Izuku so close. The ghost is a little spiteful right now though, so he just stands back and watches Izuku struggle, lips pulled downwards in a pout.

Izuku doesn't take it to heart, Oboro has his broody moments.

He makes it through the apartment without problem, and even manages to get the door open. The ghost's pout has deepened, but Izuku pays it no mind. He heads towards the stairwell, pausing at the door. This door he can't really open one handed. The knob is finicky.

He blows out a breath that flutters his bangs, crouching down to set the box on the floor so he can access the handle, twisting it just right so the door clicks open.

It's as he's standing up again with the box back in his hands that the elevator chimes with someone's arrival. Izuku stiffens, hurrying to distribute the weight of the box and slip through the door as the elevator chimes again.

Oh no.

"You have poor timing," Oboro comments smugly, arms crossed over his chest once again as he leans against the apartment doorway, stood dead in the middle of the closed door.

Izuku shoots him a glare— he wouldn't be in this situation if Oboro had helped him instead of pouting like a toddler having a tantrum— as he hurries to grab the box and make a quick escape—

"Izuku?"

Izuku freezes at Shota's confused drawl.

He slowly turns his head just enough to spot his two guardians.

Shota has his arms crossed over his chest, eyes narrowed suspiciously, while Hizashi holds a sleeping Eri. The little girl is sound asleep, little face pressed into the junction between the man's neck and shoulder with her arms loosely clutched around his neck. She looks so small. So content.

Izuku shakes himself from his thoughts.

He sees the two men exchange a look, and Izuku wonders how long they'd been communication with nothing more than quick glances at one another. How long had he been stood at the end of the hallway looking like they'd caught him doing something illegal?

He sorta doesn't want to even know.

He doesn't have long to dwell on the thought, as Shota's eyes easily drop down the box in his hands before dropping even lower to where his foot is nestled between the stairwell door and the threshold in an attempt to keep the door from slipping shut.

Izuku shifts awkwardly, adjusting his hold on the box like it'll do anything to conceal what he's doing, "oh, ah, h-hey. Um. I was just heading down to my dorm. So... I'll just—"

"Ah, ah, ah. Hold it," Hizashi's voice cuts him off as he moves to tug the door open. He freezes, wincing at how screwed he is. Hizashi shifts, shifting Eri until she's supported by just one of his arms, his newly freed hand settling on his hip. "Whatcha got there, Sunshine?"

"Oh, um, it's nothing, just, ah, just some stuff—"

"If it's just some stuff, why are you sneaking around?" Shota questions calmly, attention narrowed in on the teen.

"I'm not—" Izuku starts to say, swirling around to look at his teachers. The door clicks shut behind him when he pulls his foot out of the way, and Izuku finds himself wincing once again. He offers a sheepish smile as his guardians finally catch sight of the box in his arms in entirety.

The little green cat stuffed toy peeks out over the edge— just glossy glass eyes and fuzzy little ears— and the pawprint pillow is too big to even be slightly hidden in the small box of belongings. He's definitely caught.

Hizashi frowns as his eyes trail over the contents of the box from his position, while Shota's eyes narrow before he's lifting his prying gaze up to Izuku. Homeroom teacher and student stare at each other for a long second; Izuku can't help but fidget at the man's knowing gaze.

He knows they know what he's doing. He knows they can tell that these belongings are the ones from the apartment bedroom. He's been caught. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. He hates to admit it, be he should've listened to Oboro.

He'd been caught red-handed, and he doesn't know what that'll mean for him.

"I think we need to have a chat," Shota says lightly, gaze flicking down to the box before returning up to Izuku. The man's arms drop from where they'd been crossed over his chest, and his hands tuck into his pockets.

"Yeah," Izuku wilts, thumb tapping on the edge of the box anxiously, "alright."

He knows when to accept defeat.

Shota gives a nod at Izuku's agreement and steps towards the apartment door. He pushes it open and gestures Hizashi into the room first since he's carrying something a bit heavier than a box of trinkets. The blonde shoots Izuku a look that Izuku doesn't know how to decipher before trailing into the apartment without jostling Eri.

Shota gestures Izuku in next, standing at the by the door like he's making sure Izuku doesn't just turn on heels and leave, which he wouldn't do. Probably.

The boy sucks in a nervous breath as he finally steps towards his guardian, following the blonde into the room, all too aware of Shota stepping in right after him. He feels a hand on settle between his shoulder blades, and internally curses how his body relaxes at the touch.

He can't tell if he's in trouble or not.

Shota and Hizashi both slip their shoes off, and then Shota is stepping to Hizashi and carefully taking Eri's shoes off her feet. He's so gentle that she doesn't stir. It's so domestic that Izuku doesn't know what to think. They'll be good guardians for her. They've been good guardians for him as well, but now someone else needs them more.

"Stop thinking what you're thinking," Izuku turns his head slightly towards Oboro, enough to see the ghost, but not enough to be caught looking at nothing, who's watching Izuku with a tight expression. The ghost's mouth is turned downwards in a frown, and there's a subtle sadness in his blue eyes.

"Kiddo?"

Izuku jerks his gaze back to Hizashi, who's still holding the little girl,

and realizes with a start that he's still wearing his shoes. A quick glance down provides the information he's the *only* one still wearing his shoes. He's quick to toe them off, nudging them towards the wall by Eri's.

He hefts the box back up, it's not heavy by any means, but it's also not light with all the books in it, and cautiously trails after his guardians.

Izuku follows his guardians into the apartment, pausing as the two split off in different directions. Hizashi heads towards the living room, while Shota carries on into the kitchen.

Izuku himself lingers at the end of the genkan, peering into the apartment.

He watches the blonde lower Eri down onto the couch, the little girl still not stirring despite the transfer. The man then tugs the throw blanket that's usually on the back of the couch down over the child.

Fish wastes no time in trotting from the loveseat to settle on the blanket beside the girl, he'd taken a bit of a liking to the child, even if Eri was still unsure about the cats. Izuku can't imagine growing up and not seeing dogs and cats in day-to-day life. Introducing Eri to the entire concept of pets, Nemo, Fish and Blanket specifically, had been heartbreaking for all involved.

When Eri is fully settled on the couch, Hizashi stands to his full height. The man looks down at the child for a second to make sure she's secure before lifting his attention to Izuku, frowning when he notices him shifting awkwardly.

"C'mon, Sunshine," Hizashi offers a light smile, "lets chat in the kitchen so we don't bother Eri. She watched a little too much tv down at the teacher's dorms and got a bit overwhelmed."

Izuku gives a wordless nod, finally kicking his body into action and trailing after his guardian.

Shota stands at the counter when they make it into the kitchen. He's got two mugs on the counter behind him, and the kettle is seconds away from boiling. The man sips at a mug of fresh coffee, eyes shut as he leans back against the counter.

He looks tired.

Izuku feels guilty. He's not sure why.

Shota's eyes sliver open when he hears their footsteps, but he's turning towards the kettle when it bubbles up to a boil. Izuku watches as the man pours the water into the mugs easily. He sees Hizashi move to settle at the kitchen table out of the corner of his eye.

"Have a seat, Kid," Shota says without looking back at Izuku.

The teen can't help but startle at being addressed, and it's then he notices he'd been clutching the box of belongings to his chest like it's some sort of security blanket. He loosens his grip as he carefully inches into the room.

He isn't sure why he's so nervous. He knows this is just a conversation — it's always just a conversation. He's not been yelled at yet, not in home life at least, because everyone knows he'd been yelled at a lot during class, and he doesn't think what he'd been caught doing was overly bad? Is he wrong? Oboro had been trying to warn him, but had it really been an actual problem? Had he really upset them?

He sets the box down by his chair before sitting down stiffly.

He drags his nails over his thighs lightly, anxiously, as he waits.

It's not much time later that a tea is being set in front of him.

Shota offers a tiny smile as he retracts his hand. Before the man steps away he sets a hand on Izuku's head, ruffling his fingers gently through green curls. Izuku knows he leans into the touch, but it doesn't stop the nerves churning his stomach.

Izuku wraps his hands around the mug, slotting three of his fingers through the handle as he cups shaking fingers around the hot ceramic. He lifts the mug to his lips, taking a tiny hesitant sip to gage the temperature of the tea.

Not too hot, but hot enough that he softly blows out a cooling breath before actually taking a sip.

It's perfect. Steeped perfectly to his liking, sweetened just right. It's even the mug he tends to always choose when given the option. It's not his, but it's definitely his favorite. A good size, and light weight. Durable. Good for a toddler-like ghost who isn't always as great with his hands as he thinks he is. It's hit the floor more times than Izuku can count.

That guilty feeling is back; squeezing around his heart uncomfortably

as he stares down into the green tea. He's not used to people knowing how he likes his tea. He's the one to know other people's preference, not usually the other way around.

People don't tend to notice little things like that, and certainly not about him. Izuku frowns at the thought, watching the little ripples in his tea from his faint thumbing at the side of the mug.

He knows he hadn't been doing anything bad— not really. All he'd been doing was taking his stuff downstairs, right? There are worse things he could've been caught doing. He was just moving a box. But... he was technically acting against their wishes, right?

"You know, Problem Child," Izuku jerks his attention up from his steaming tea, blinking thoughtlessly when he notices Shota now settled at the table too. They're both watching him, grasping their own warm drinks between their palms. Izuku is momentarily brought back to that first night with his guardians when Shota had first found out he was homeless.

Shota faintly quirks his head to the side when he sees he has Izuku's attention, "typically when people decide to move out, they give a heads up to their guardians."

"...what?" Izuku blinks owlishly. "B-but I wasn't—"

"The moving box at your feet says otherwise," the underground Hero points out not unkindly.

"I wasn't," Izuku insists, shifting enough that his foot bumps against the box, "I was just, well, I mean— okay, I, uh, I was bringing some stuff downstairs, I guess, but I'm not moving out! J-just clearing out the room a little? It's only one room to another, right?"

His guardians share a look and Izuku bites back a wince, "that, ah, is pretty much the definition of moving out, Kiddo. Any particular reason you were just clearing some stuff out of your room? Something wrong with the room?"

"No! Ah, n-no, the room is-is perfect! Nothing is wrong. With... with the room, I mean. It's good. As always. I just thought..." Izuku shakes his head, "well, I thought that it would be, um, best?"

"Best?" Shota repeats, mouth curling faintly into a frown.

Izuku bobs his head in a nod, thumbing along the handle of his mug

just so he has something to do with his hands. He looks down at the table, scared to actually look at either of his guardians. He doesn't want to see hurt, or anger; doesn't think he'd be able to handle it.

"Okay," Hizashi hums softly, when Izuku doesn't elaborate, "well, wanna take us through your thoughts then? We want to understand, but we don't. Not yet. How is moving your stuff from one room to another best?"

Izuku hesitates for a second, gaze flicking up to first Hizashi, and then to Shota before dropping back down to his tea, "I just... thought you guys might feel better about letting Eri have the spare room if there wasn't anything of mine left in there. Free up some room. It's empty— just a spare room with nothing in it. Nothing that makes it mine, you know? I can just... take this stuff downstairs and everything works out, right?"

"It's not a spare room though," Shota tells him gently, endlessly patient, "a lack of your personal belongings doesn't make the room a spare. That won't change the fact that the second bedroom in this apartment is yours. It's yours with or without your things in there. We have that bedroom for you. Nezu added the secondary bedroom to the layout with you in mind. I'm sorry, Kid, but we're going to stand firm on this one: we're not letting Eri take your room."

Izuku slumps in his chair, staring at his mug. Defeat swirls in his stomach with the uncertainty and guilt already churning. It's not a very nice mixture or feeling.

He knows they've had this conversation before— they had this conversation while Eri was still in the hospital, and they'd insisted they weren't going to give Eri the room. He hadn't thought they'd be this serious about it— not when they're sleeping on futons in the living room when there's a perfectly good bed just down the hall.

"She can't keep sleeping on the floor," Izuku says without looking up. "Don't you think she needs a space of her own? Somewhere she can have toys, and privacy and sleep on a bed? We can't all keep sleeping in the living room, and soon I'll need to return to my dorm anyways."

"Of course she needs a space of her own," Hizashi nods firmly, "but that space she needs isn't going to be your space. We're not going to take something away from you and give it to someone else. We understand that you think the room is... *superficial*, but it's yours. We spend a lot of time here, and you deserve to have your own space in

our home— in *your* home."

"I have a dorm downstairs," Izuku reminds wryly. "I don't need two bedrooms on campus."

"But it's just that, Izuku: a dorm," Shota replies, "all of the students have a dorm, but they also have a place to sleep at home. A space away from school. Just because you kids sleep here during the school week, doesn't mean they lose their space, their *place*, at home.

"Bakugou and Hitoshi still have bedrooms to return to, and I'm sure none of your peer's home sleeping arrangements have changed much between dorm life and going home for weekends or holidays. It's exactly the same for you. You need a place that isn't a school dorm; your own space outside of school. The bedroom in this apartment is that for you, and we won't be giving that to someone else."

"Well," Hizashi bites his lip, offering a lopsided smile, "as close to outside of school as we can get when we're stuck on campus as live-in teachers."

"But what about Eri?" Izuku finally looks up at them.

"I thought we told you we'd figure it out?" Shota leans back in his chair with a frown. "You're a kid, Izuku, this isn't your problem to be solving. There's a lot more to this than just finding Eri a bed and a bedroom. This isn't something you can sort out overnight."

"But," Hizashi continues softly, leaning back in his seat so he can faintly gaze into the living room where they know Eri is still sleeping, "we have been working on it. Sleeping in the living room is temporary. For now, she feels comfortable with the two of you sleeping out there with her. We're looking into what's best for Eri right now. And for you too."

"Me?" Izuku bristles, "this isn't about me."

"It is," Shota disagrees, sipping at his tea. "Well. Not just you, Problem Child, all of us. This isn't a decision we can take lightly; not when it involves all of us."

Izuku isn't sure he likes that answer, brow furrowing as he tightens his grip on the mug in his hands, "what sort of decision is it then?"

Shota and Hizashi exchange another glance, "a decision about Eri's placement."

“That’s here, isn’t it?” Izuku blinks, then he blinks a second time as the words sink in. “Shota has guardianship over her, doesn’t he? Her placement is here. With you guys. She needs that. I think she’ll be happy up here with you guys.”

“It’s not that simple, Kiddo,” Hizashi shakes his head with a sad smile, “Sho does have guardianship right now, but that was more or less a panic placement by social services and the police department. She has a powerful Quirk that she can’t control, and Eraserhead just so happened to be the involved Hero with a Quirk that can nullify hers. It was the safest option on such short notice.”

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, he knows all this— he'd been at the hospital too when Shota had been granted guardianship over Eri. It made the most sense, so he wasn’t sure why Hizashi was explaining it now.

Before Izuku can get a word in though, Shota beats him to the punch. As the man speaks, he leans back against the chair and rakes his fingers through his hair, “but safest doesn’t always mean best.”

“But... it’s *safest*,” Izuku disagrees. “And she’s happy here, right? You guys are really good guardians— I mean, you’ve helped me a lot, and you take good care of me. I don’t know where I’d be now if I’d never been placed with you. So... so I know this will work out! I know Eri will love living here with you guys. She needs people like you in her life.”

“You’re the cutest, Sunshine,” Hizashi coos, reaching over the table to ruffle Izuku’s hair, “I’m so glad you’re still happy with us, but... I’m not sure we can be what Eri needs.”

“What...” Izuku asks quietly, gaze flicking between his two guardians, “What does that mean?”

“It means we don’t think we’re ready for a second kid,” Hizashi tells him calmly. Izuku pauses, brain whirring as it tries to catch up. “There’s a big difference between fostering a little kid and a teenager, Kiddo.”

“There is?” He asks dumbly, surprise settling in his gaze. The question hangs in the lapse of silence for a second before he realizes just how dumb it does sound as his guardians look between one another as if trying to figure out how to answer such a question.

Of course there’s an obvious difference between a little girl and a teenager,

Izuku, nice one. Eloquent as always.

He tries to swallow down the festering embarrassment of that question as he elaborates, “I-I mean, I know we’re different, obviously— she's six; I’m sixteen. That’s ten years of a difference. She obviously needs more... um *more*. From you guys. L-like comfort and support and stuff but... I don’t understand why you can’t be that for her? You’ve done that for me— you *still* do that for me.”

“Yes and no,” Shota tells him easily, sipping thoughtfully at his coffee before returning his attention to Izuku. “I wouldn’t exactly say little kids need more; they just need *different*. All children are different. You’re different to the handful of other foster kids we took in briefly before you. And Eri would need something entirely different from you as well.

“You all needed something different from us depending on your situation. We’ve had kids stay just a couple nights while things at home got sorted out, and temporary placements while something more permanent was figured out. You needed something more permanent, and we were the most suitable placement. Eri needs permanent too, but it’s not exactly the same.”

“He’s right, but... there is truth in the fact that little kids generally do need different sorta care,” Hizashi tacks on. “You’re right that Eri will need a place where she’s safe and supported. Where she feels comfortable and has her own space to grow and work her way through the trauma of what happened to her— but she also needs a more involved parent. A caretaker around the clock. She’s very young, Kiddo, she needs someone to be a constant part of her life.”

“You guys can’t?” Izuku asks quietly.

It’s an honest question— he's trying to understand. He’s getting answers now. A discussion. They’re laying everything out for him, and he’s slowly piecing together the opposite side’s argument.

“We can’t,” Shota sighs, rubbing at his eyes, “we work five jobs between us, and I’m already raising a class of hellions that I’m quite sure will give me a heart attack at some point before you lot graduate. And there’s you to take into account as well.”

“Me?” Izuku asks a second time. He’s not sure why they keep thinking of him.

Shouldn’t everyone be focused on Eri? She needs it more, doesn’t she?

Still, he thinks if he questions any further, they'll have those sad looks again, which he definitely doesn't want to see. It always makes him feel... sad too. He doesn't want to disappoint them. And... he can feel the ghost's eyes glaring a hole through his back from where he sits against the kitchen wall. Another warning to keep his thoughts to himself.

"You," Hizashi nods seriously. "We'll always take you into account first, Sunshine. Just because there was even a *thought* of Eri staying here more permanently, doesn't change your place here— to us. You came first, and a new placement won't change that. You're our kid, ya'dig?"

"Right," Shota agrees, angling his head towards Hizashi with a tiny nod before looking back at the teenager, "truthfully, Kid, we don't even know if we're giving you what you need between our jobs. The only reason we can make this work is because you're a teenager. You have friends you want to spend time with, and you're self-efficient now in a way a child should never have to be. You can take care of yourself if we're home late, or busy with work. A little girl, especially a little girl like Eri, with very limited experience, can't do the same."

"You are!" Izuku jerks his attention up, zeroing in on the statement that's just not true, "you're good. Really good. Um, g-good guardians. *Great* guardians, even! I really am happy to be here with you guys. A-and I'm so thankful you've... that you're kept me around even though you're busy! I... I've never thought differently either. I think you're giving me just what I need."

Izuku blows out a nervous breath, cutting himself off and wilting down into his seat as he does so. His tea has gone cold now, but he still wraps his hands around the mug and takes another sip. He taps his fingers against the ceramic, bowing his head thoughtfully.

"I also... sorta think you're underestimating yourselves," Izuku adds quietly, not looking up at either of them. He doesn't know if he should be saying this— doesn't dare look up to see their faces. "You've helped me a lot. I've grown a lot as a person and a Hero, and I know you could do the same for Eri. You've always been looking out for me. E-even before my... m-my mom... a-and when I— just... you've both been amazing guardians. Something that I... never really had. Not in the capacity that I think I maybe should've."

Hizashi gives an almost sad sounding hum, "you never should've grown up the way you did."

The man lets out a heavy sigh, rubbing at his forehead. He looks troubled by the thought. “It was wrong, and neglectful. You deserved better, listener. We’d love to take Eri in— she’s a lovely little girl, but if we have any doubts about taking her on, we shouldn’t risk it. Even *unintentional* neglect will cause damage, and we’d never want to hurt her by forcing this to happen when there are alternatives out there that will be healthier for all involved.”

That makes sense.

Izuku hadn’t really thought of it like that.

He hates to think about it, but he wonders how different his life would be if someone reported his mother being gone more than she’d been home when he was little. If neighbors had noticed a sad, neglected Quirkless kid and cared enough to involve social services.

How different would he be if he’d grown up in a stable environment where he was *wanted*.

He feels tears welling in the corner of his eyes as he thinks of little Izuku waiting up on the couch for mom to come home. Cooking for himself and taking care of his own injuries after Kacchan and classmates got too rough and doing all the chores, so his mom never came home to a mess. Getting himself to and from school and only seeing his mother in the form of shadows sneaking around in the early morning or late night.

That’s no way for a kid to be raised.

And it’s definitely no way for Eri to be raised. She’d been through enough already for that to become her day-to-day life. Exchanging one toxic environment for another in a different form.

“Sunshine?” Hizashi’s voice comes out so soft, and then there’s a hand on Izuku’s, a gentle thumb brushing along his knuckles. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Izuku gives a watery laugh as he brings his other hand up to palm the tears away. He sniffles out another laugh, angling his head down to rub his cheek against his shoulder. The friction of his shift on his cheek drags him back to the present.

He feels a chilling presence behind him and takes comfort in the fact his friend is close and offering his own comfort. He knows if Oboro could, he’d have already set a grounding hand on Izuku’s shoulder.

“You’re right,” the teen finally offers a shaky smile, eyes glistening with tears, “that’s just... not any way for a little kid to be raised. I don’t think you guys could ever be like my mom, and I know you’d never mean it like she did, but... if you have even a doubt that there’s even a chance you don’t think you can make her your whole world, maybe... maybe a different placement is a good idea.”

“Between everything,” Shota hesitates, watching Izuku with a thoughtful expression, “it just isn’t logical for us to take in another kid right now. I need to be able to focus on the kids I already have—you, your classmates, Hitoshi—I can’t be giving you all what you need when there’s a little girl relying on me too. No one should be put on a backburner in this situation.”

Izuku gives a nod, finally coming to terms with the fact that Eri staying with them, as much as he’d love for the little girl to stay, might not be the best-case scenario for any of them.

“We know you love that little girl, Sunshine,” Hizashi smiles fondly, expression soft and open, “and you’d make an amazing older brother, but the best place for Eri is somewhere she’ll have all the attention she needs. Between school, Heroics and my radio show, I don’t think any of us would be able to be the constant she needs in her life.”

Izuku nods once again to show he understands. He gets it. There’s no point in Shota and Hizashi taking on a second foster kid if they don’t think they’re the right placement. Izuku doesn’t entirely see it from the same angle, he knows they’re amazing parents, but if they’re vetoing it for Eri’s sake, he believes it’s the right option.

“So... if she’s not staying here...” Izuku hazards, fiddling with the handle of his mug, “where will Eri be going?”

His guardians exchange a knowing look, and Izuku feels a sense of dread settle in his stomach. He hadn’t prepared himself for this.

He sucks in a nervous breath, not wanting to ask his next question, but knowing he needs to. Still, the words come out fearful and choked, “will we... get to see her still?”

“Oh, sweetheart,” Hizashi coos, finally standing up and rounding the table to wrap Izuku in a hug. Izuku melts into the embrace, letting his head fall back against Hizashi’s chest to look over at the man leaning over him, “we’d never take her away from you. Of course, you’ll get to see her still. She needs you and Togata as much as the two of you need her.

“As sad as it is to think about, we know she has an emotional attachment to the both of you— you two were the first to find her, and the ones to bring her home in the end. It would do more damage to take her away from that entirely, though we don’t want her becoming too reliant on either of you either. A situation like this is delicate.”

“We’ll still see her?” Izuku can’t help the relief in his tone. He’s thankful. He thinks maybe he’s sorta emotionally attached to her as well a bit. The fight against Chisaki had been traumatic— especially when it had come down to Eri and Izuku using one another’s power to fight the villain. “Will she be going far? Is there someone you have in mind to take her? I know she’s with us right now because of her Quirk, so I doubt she can go into regular foster care...”

Probably for the best anyways.

“She can’t,” Shota agrees, watching Hizashi fondly as the man finally pulls away from where he’d been wrapped around Izuku like a koala. The blonde presses a kiss to the top of the boy’s head before heading back to his own seat. Izuku can tell his cheeks flush at the domesticity as Shota grins softly.

The man’s smile lingers for a second before the seriousness is back, “Eri’s situation is a bit different than most child protective services cases. The yakuza is dangerous, even if Chisaki is locked up in Tartarus. Right now, as you know, she’s in a specialized Hero witness protection program. That means she’s considered a high priority victim. She has a valuable Quirk that could potentially be dangerous, so she can’t be placed just anywhere. And Chisaki did manage to make Quirk erasing bullets from her Quirk.”

“What does that mean though?” Izuku asks, head cocking to the side in curiosity. He gets the gist of it— Eri needs to be placed somewhere that has the means to keep her safe from an attack. Not to mention a place that can also keep her and everyone else safe from a Quirk accident should she have another one.

“Ideally,” Hizashi continues, “she’d be placed with a Hero, or sometimes an exception foster parent if the security and safety measures are suited for the child in question. I wouldn’t say a lot of Heroes have fostering licenses, but quite a few do. We got ours when we started teaching, just in case, but I probably would’ve either way.”

“Same here,” Shota adds. “A lot of underground Heroes tend to have a

fostering license."

"Right," Hizashi nods in agreement. The blond glances thoughtfully into the living room again, but by the silence (and the confirmation from the ghost who checks in on her) she's still asleep. "Still... Eri can't be placed with just anyone. Her Quirk is dangerous if she can't control it, so there needs to be someone who can stop it if she did have an accident."

Izuku mentally runs through the list of Heroes who have an Erasure type Quirks, but as far as he knows, Eraserhead is the only one with an ideal Quirk. He frowns to himself, "there aren't any Heroes who have a Quirk like Erasure," Izuku's nose scrunches at the thought, "where will she go then?"

"You're thinking to narrowly," Shota tells him, the corners of his mouth ticking upwards almost proudly. "The Quirk doesn't need to be an Erasure Quirk; it needs to be able to *nullify* Eri's own in some way or another. Broaden your horizon. It's not the most straightforward answer, but it's logical."

He runs through the Heroes he knows once again but comes up short a second time. Why does it feel like he's trying to solve some riddle?

Izuku narrows his eyes, lips puckering as he looks between his guardians suspiciously, "do you guys actually have someone in mind to take Eri, or am I just supposed to be giving you ideas on candidates?"

Hizashi let out a bark of laughter, grinning widely at the accusation, as Shota snorts out his own quieter laugh. The man flaps a dismissive hand, "we do, Problem Child," Shota tells him fondly, "and we're in the process of transferring guardianship now."

"Already?" Izuku blinks in surprise, "where is she going? Who has a Quirk that can nullify her Quirk?"

"It's still up in the air. We need a lot of different permissions from a lot of different people to transfer guardianship, especially when it comes to high priority victims." Hizashi tells the teenager, "but... Nemuri is the one who's interested in becoming Eri's foster mother."

Izuku hears a muttered, *"holy shit, no way!"* behind him, but makes no move to turn and look at the ghost. He's not sure what he thinks about the surprise in the ghost's tone.

“Nemuri?” Izuku tastes the familiar sounding name before it really clicks into place, “Midnight-Sensei?”

“That’s the one,” Shota snorts out, “not exactly your first guess, huh?”

Izuku shakes his head softly.

Midnight hadn’t been in his thoughts at all.

It’s nothing against her, just... some of the comments she makes and the sensual overall attitude aren’t exactly qualities he’d think would be best for raising a little girl. She has a tendency to not be entirely... *chaste*, either in school, or while she’s out doing Hero work. She really is the R-Rated Hero.

Then again, after meeting Nemuri out of costume, she had been different.

There was still the sultry tease that seemed to be a part of her personality, but it was much more subdued. Casual. She had been very kind, and if she can be nice to him, he doesn’t doubt she’ll be nice to a sweet little girl like Eri.

“It’s all a persona, Izuku,” Shota tells him, as if reading his mind. “Nemuri’s always been a motherly type— she used to mother hen us all the time in school. She helped us more than some of our teachers did, and always found the time to meet up with us despite her busy, opposite to ours schedule. Even after we graduated, she still made it her personal mission to take care of us when she could. Who do you think got us these teaching jobs?”

“She really has always been looking out for us,” Hizashi agrees with a light smile. He leans back in his chair and looks up towards the ceiling reminiscent like, “after we lost our best friend she was one of the people who kicked our asses back into action, and she’s always made an effort to give us what we need instead of what we wanted. That’s hard to balance, but she’s always managed. I’ve always looked up to her— she's always been a good Senpai to us.”

“Senpai,” Shota snorts, rolling his eyes fondly, “she has always liked to point out that one year age gap like it makes any difference whatsoever—”

“It’s almost two years for you, babe. You were always her favorite, youngest kiddo, amirite~” Hizashi snickers. Izuku doesn’t need to look to know Shota had kicked his husband’s shin under the table at

the teasing, but Hizashi's yelp makes him crack a smile.

"Anyways," Shota clears his throat, pointedly looking at a pouting Hizashi, "the point is, Midnight is just a persona. Just like Present Mic. Nemuri is sarcastic and a pain in my ass, but she's also so incredibly loyal and nurturing. There isn't another Hero out there I'd feel more comfortable handing custody of that little girl over to."

"They're right," Oboro speaks behind Izuku. He still can't look back at the ghost, but he does shift in a way that lets the ghost know he's being heard. "She's a lot more than a seductive heartthrob. I didn't know her as well as these two back then, but she was always super kind even whenever I was being a blundering lovesick puppy towards her. She put up with me, and I've watched her take care of these idiots for years. Eri will be in good hands, she'll be good for the kid."

"She really wants her?" Izuku asks uncertainly.

"She does. She wants to help Eri," Shota replies softly, "just like we do. The only difference is she has more time to do it. Midnight's only obligation right now is teaching, so Eri will have a guardian who has time to be with her. Nemuri also has room in her dorm apartment—all the teacher apartments got a second bedroom, so she has the space for it as well. Eri will have her own room, and a bed, just like you want for her. And no one needs to move out for it."

Shota pauses, eyes scanning Izuku's face, lips quirking up faintly as the teen flushes in embarrassment and toes awkwardly at the box at his feet like it's evidence of a crime.

The underground Hero lets out a humorous exhale as he continues, "everyone will be happy, and no one has to give anything up. And she's still close enough that if Nemuri's Quirk doesn't work in the desired way against Eri's own, I can get there relatively fast and use Erasure."

"Oh right," Izuku hums, everything finally clicking into place, "Somnambulist. I forgot about that. It's an anesthetic more or less. It's not quite an Erasure type Quirk but... but it could put Eri to sleep if she loses control, right? That's... actually a really good idea. Induced sleep is probably less traumatic than having her Quirk stripped away by Erasure..."

"You're such a Quirk nerd," Oboro snorts out fondly.

"Right you are," Hizashi nods, "and the little Listener will still be

super close, only a couple minutes walk away. We'll still be able to see her all the time, Nem's practically family, so Eri is too. You'll still get to be the greatest 'zuku-nii you can be! Don't worry your little head, alright, Sunshine? Everything will fall into place when we're not forcing it to happen."

Izuku doesn't say anything for a second. He looks between his guardians, before turning in his chair to peek into the living room. The little girl is still sleeping, from what he can see.

"So?" Shota's voice jolts Izuku from his thoughts. He swirls back around to look at his guardians, staring wide-eyed. "Do you think this arrangement is satisfactory?"

"Yeah," Izuku gives a nod, smiling slightly as he does so. "I know you guys would make good guardians for Eri because you're good guardians for me too, but if it's not you guys taking her in then... then I think Nemuri-sama is a good alternative. A good compromise."

"Good," Shota bows his head in a nod, looking pleased, "now please tell me you'll stop trying to move out. We like having you around, Problem Child. We like knowing you have a room up here with us."

"Yeah," Izuku gives a sheepish laugh, rubbing at the back of his neck as he pushes away from the table just enough to look down at the box under it. "I will. I'm sorry."

"No, don't apologize," Hizashi waves a dismissive hand, offering a soft grin, "it's really sweet that you were so worried about Eri-chan, but next time... maybe give us a chance to figure stuff out before taking matters into your own hands and trying to move out without anyone noticing, yeah? I probably would've cried if I looked in your room and saw it empty, ya'dig?"

"He definitely would've," Shota agrees drily. He ignores Hizashi's squawk of betrayal, attention lulling back onto Izuku, "you've gotta put a little bit of trust into us, Kiddo, we're trying to do what's best for everyone; you included. Just... maybe talk to us the next time you're thinking about moving."

"I wasn't *really* moving out," Izuku mumbles in embarrassment, "but I will."

"Thank you," Hizashi snickers at Izuku's embarrassed pout. The man lifts his mug to his lips, draining the last of his tea before gathering everyone's empty mugs. "Now, how's about you take your stuff back

to *your* room and unpack. I'm going to get started on dinner, and Shota, you should get a jump start on that guardian transfer paperwork. You know Nem's going to be on your ass about it now."

"Yeah," the tired man sighs. "Probably best to start on that while Eri's sleeping."

Izuku looks between his guardians as they each stand to go about their business. Izuku lingers for a second before smiling to himself and following suit. He grabs the box and silently makes his way to his room.

He feels someone follow him into the room.

"Don't say it," Izuku mutters under his breath as he closes the door behind himself. He turns to the bed, unsurprised to see the ghost sitting cross-legged on the bottom corner of the bed, a shit-eating grin on his face.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Izu," Oboro defends, lifting his hands in surrender.

Izuku nods to himself, cocking a suspicious eyebrow at the grinning ghost before finally turning to set the box on the desk. He pulls out the green stuffed cat first, thumbing over the glass eyes and smiling down at it. He grabs the paw print pillow too, turning to the head of the bed where he settles each down on the comforter.

Something about putting them back on the bed feels *right*.

"Hey, Izuku?"

"Hn?"

"I told you so."

It's exactly four days after the discussion in the kitchen that Nemuri is awarded custody of Eri.

Izuku doesn't know a lot of the legal stuff that happens—he knows he and Eri spend a lot of time upstairs in the apartment together, and down in the dorms while his guardians and Nemuri are meeting with principal Nezu, and social services and even the police department to get everything in order.

He's sad that he's not getting a little sister, that he can't be there for

the little girl constantly, but he's glad Nemuri is the one taking her in. And he's glad he's not losing the little girl entirely. Five minutes away is better than across Japan. He still gets to be a part of her life.

When everyone wasn't busy with important meetings, they found themselves slowly introducing Eri to Nemuri. She seems to like the Pro, and there's no doubt that Nemuri doesn't already adore the little girl. She gets down on Eri's level, and they have conversations.

Eri starts warming up to Nemuri since she's pretty much a constant in the afternoons and evenings.

The woman joins them for dinner, and sometimes for lunch, if they can manage. They take the time to play child friendly games just to get Eri comfortable. A lot of it is teaching Eri how to be a kid, which is heartbreaking in its own way, but Izuku is glad she's getting to be a kid after everything.

She still hadn't completely warmed up to Shota and Hizashi, not like she had Izuku and Togata, but she's more comfortable with them than she is with Nemuri. It makes sense considering Nemuri is a new face, where she'd seen Shota during the raid, and Hizashi in the hospital for that week she'd been admitted.

Eri still stays close to Izuku, but he hopes as Eri lives with the Pro, she'll come around to the idea of having a guardian, just like Izuku had. He wants this to go swiftly— he wants her to feel safe. He hopes Nemuri can be what Eri needs, just like Shota and Hizashi had for Izuku.

The day the Pro gets custody is the day Eri moves into her new home.

Nemuri is excited when they arrive with the little girl. Nemuri doesn't even bat an eyelash at the less than excited reaction from the child, simply gets down on her knees beside Izuku and Eri—the little girl has a bone-white grip on Izuku's own hand, shyly pressing against his side like Nemuri is suddenly a stranger instead of the nice lady who came bearing small gifts and sweets whenever she visited.

Nemuri doesn't seem offended in the least, which Izuku guiltily realizes he'd been anticipating. He doesn't know why this is so hard. He knows she'll be safe and happy here, but he's still anxious. Maybe it's Eri's own hesitance that has him on high alert?

"Eri-chan," Nemuri coos, smiling widely, "you've gotta see the new room we put together for you! You remember all the teachers, right?

You met most of them, huh? Well, everyone's worked togther to make your new room special just for you! Isn't that exciting? Lemillion even helped some! He picked out some new toys for you!"

Eri looks interested, but instead of taking the bait, she pushes even closer to Izuku, looking up at him with wide, nervous eyes. Izuku offers her a smile, squeezing lightly at the small hand in his own.

"I have an idea," Nemuri continues, smile never waning, "why doesn't Izuku-nii take you down the hall and show you? We're just going to chat in the kitchen, alright? You come find us when you're finished looking around and then we can how some of the cookies you made with 'zuku-nii's friends down in the dorms, okay?"

"Okay," Eri agrees softly, studying Nemuri before looking up hopefully at Izuku. "Can we?"

"Of course," he assures, bending down she he's closer to her height as well, "I really want to see your room too! You saw mine, remember? I'm sure your new room will be so much cooler!"

"Yeah!" Hizashi agrees from the doorway, watching the interactions with a soft expression. "Your room is so cool, Eri-chan! You little Listeners should totally look around and check it out! We'll be right in the kitchen if you need us!"

Shota nods but doesn't add anything.

The more hyping they do, the more excited Eri looks. The tense grip on his hand loosens some, but she doesn't pull away. "Want me to show you, Eri-chan?"

The little girl nods, eyes bright with curiosity. He pulls away just enough that she's no longer shoved against Izuku's side, looking up with an awestruck expression as she waits for Izuku to lead her to the room.

"Just keep an eye out for Sushi," Nemuri reminds, as they finally start towards the hallway. Shota and Hizashi are already making their way towards the kitchen as Nemuri lingers in the kitchen doorway as she continues, "that little sweetheart has been obsessed with Eri-chan's new room."

"We will," Izuku assures with a smile thrown back over his shoulder at the woman. That's all the assurance Nemuri seems to need as she returns the smile and finally joins Izuku's guardians.

“Sushi?” Eri blinks, glancing back at where Nemuri had just been before looking up at Izuku for an answer.

“That’s the kitty who lives here,” Izuku explains, “he’s very old and a bit shy so you might not see him a lot. You’ve gotta be gentle if you do, alright?”

“Like Blanket and Fish,” Eri connects the dots.

Izuku nods fondly as he leads her down the hallway.

He bites back a smile at the fact Eri doesn’t even know Nemo exists, since the cat had decided right off the bat she hated children and kept herself hidden in the bedrooms whenever Eri was awake. “That’s right. We have to be gentle with Sushi like Shota taught us to be with Fish. You could hurt them if you’re too rough, or they could hurt you by trying to tell you to stop, okay?”

“Okay,” Eri nods seriously, absorbing his words like a little sponge.

It isn’t hard finding Eri’s new room. He hasn’t seen it yet— hadn't even been to Nemuri’s apartment above the 2-GenEd class once, but there’s only three doors down the hall and one of them has pink, glittery kanji for the name ‘Eri’ hanging on it.

He makes an educated decision to push that door open.

They stand in the doorway for a second, both just staring into the room.

It’s nice— the bed has a character themed bedspread for the show Izuku had showed her, and there’s a dresser and toy box. A small table with four little chairs pushed under it and a tea set placed delicately on top of the tabletop. There’s a bunch of toys, colouring books and crayons. He spots a sea of stuffed animals, no doubt being the one item most people got the girl as a welcome home gift.

Izuku wonders how much of these new toys they’ll need to show her how to use.

“’zuku-nii?” Izuku turns towards the little girl. “Is this really for me?”

Izuku feels his heart melt in his chest as he moves to kneel beside the bed where Eri is standing. He hadn’t noticed her move from his side, but he silently takes that as a good sign. She looks around, her expression shy and perplexed all the same. Her eyes trail over the

room, taking everything in.

“It sure is,” Izuku tells her softly, patting the bed and helping her up on to it, “Nemmie, Shota and Hizashi decorated it for you, remember? And the rest of the teachers. Even Lemillion and some of the other students got you all these new toys. This is all for you. This is your room.”

The nickname that Midnight had asked to be referred by feels awkward in Izuku’s mouth.

It feels far too personal for his Sensei, and a Pro Hero, but he understands that she wouldn’t want the little girl calling her Sensei all the time. Eri’s young enough that whatever name she knows you by is probably the name that’ll stick for a while.

He knows Shota and Hizashi had also gotten tired of being called Sensei at home too.

Izuku feels a light smile lift onto his lips as he thinks back to his own awkwardness back then.

Izuku watches fondly as the little girl checks the room out. She’d slipped off the bed and was now just toddling around the room taking everything in. He can see the questions in her gaze as she inspects her new toys, but she’d probably to overwhelmed to ask anything.

“Eri-chan?” Izuku calls, waiting for the child to look back at him before he smiles fondly and continues, “have you ever had a tea party?”

Her nose scrunches in confusion as she shakes her head.

“This,” the boy shuffles on his knees to the small table. He picks up the little tea pot by the handle, turning towards her and continuing, “is a tea set. It’s really fun— we could have pretend tea, and you invite guests. I’m sure some of your new toys would like to come to a tea party.”

“They would?” Eri looks back at the pile of stuffed toys, brow furrowed once again. “Who?”

“Pick any of them,” Izuku insists gently, “find two, so everyone can have a seat.”

“Okay!” Eri’s eyes are wide with excitement. She darts over to the

mountain of stuffed toys, digging through so she can select the ones she likes.

“How’s it going in here?” Izuku turns at the sound of Oboro’s voice. “Nem is stressed out, so I hope you’re making progress with Eri. It might be a rough next couple days if Eri doesn’t settle.”

Oboro’s eyes flick to where Eri is comparing toys now, “looks like you’re having some luck.”

Izuku offers a silent nod as the ghost steps further into the room, looking around with a nod of approval. Izuku knows the ghost had been coming and going with his guardians every so often, and he took every chance he could to interact with Sushi.

“Man, this room really came together— she really looks like she likes it. I’m glad. The kid deserves it—” Oboro’s eyes widen, as does his smile as he bounds closer, “ooh! Are you having a tea party? I wanna come!”

Izuku snorts a laugh to himself as the ghost seats himself in one of the tiny chairs, looking entirely to proud of himself. Izuku isn’t sure he’s ever seen the ghost so excited. For a tea party. A pretend tea party.

“Don’t give me that look,” the ghost waggles a finger in Izuku’s direction. The green-haired teen is hunched over the small table, his knees almost in his chest as he squeezes in. His pretzel bent body is supported by just his elbow on the tiny table, hand cupping his chin. The ghost doesn’t have the same problem, knees phased through the table, tea pot and the teacup in front of him. “This is practically ghost tea. Pretend is about the peak of my palate now.”

“Okay, well, you’re in someone else’s spot,” Izuku tells the ghost under his breath.

Oboro leans back in the chair defiantly, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I picked two!” Eri chirps as she joins Izuku at the table. Hugged to her chest is a plush unicorn toy, and a Midnight doll. Izuku blinks at the official Pro Hero merch, before hiding a smile behind his hand. Maybe Nemuri had made more progress than they thought.

Eri settles at Izuku’s side, scanning the table before frowning. She rounds Izuku and settles both the unicorn and the Midnight doll into the same chair before returning to Izuku’s other side and taking her

own seat.

Oboro's chair is empty. Well, beside Oboro.

Izuku opens his mouth to question the decision to sit two guests on the same seat when there's a fourth available but decides better of it. Eri is playing. Who is he to question her methods?

"What now, 'zuku-nii?"

"Well, did you make pretend tea?"

Eri blinks slowly before pulling the pot towards herself. She takes the lid off, and looks inside, "um, yes?"

"Okay," Izuku bites back a snicker, "then you should pour it for all your guests."

Eri's mouth forms an 'o' shape as she carefully stands, shifting the pot to support it in her two hands. Her tongue pokes out in concentration as she carefully pours herself a cup of pretend tea. The confusion in her expression is funny, but she also looks like she's enjoying herself as she moves to Izuku's cup to repeat the process.

"Is it fun?" Izuku asks her.

"It sure is," Oboro grins cheekily, "Eri really knows how to throw a killer tea party."

Eri nods enthusiastically as the ghost teases, leaning over the table to pour the unicorn and Midnight their cup. She's treating the small plastic pot as if it was the glass pot she'd probably seen on the table at their apartment.

"You know, I'm sure Nemmie would love to have a tea party with you later," Izuku edges carefully, reading the little girl's expression before continuing, "then you could have Midnight-san and Nemmie both at your tea party. They're both really cool Heroes, just like Eraserhead, Present Mic and Lemillion."

"And Deku. Uhm... Really?" Eri asks quietly, looking towards the ajar door. "She would?"

"I know she'd love to," Izuku nods, offering Eri a comforting smile. "You know, I was a little scared when I first started staying with Shota and Hizashi. But they just wanted to help me, just like Nemuri wants

to help you. I promise you'll have a lot of fun here, with Nemmie."

Eri fiddles with the tea pot in her hands, lifting nervous eyes to Izuku. "You're like me?"

"Just like you," Izuku assures, even though their situations are worlds apart. "I know it's scary, but you're safe here. Nemmie will protect you, and she can even help you if your Quirk is being bad again. Remember? You just go to sleep, nice and easy."

Eri nods slowly, red eyes staring intently down at the little tea pot. "Uhm, okay... Do you promise?"

"I promise," Izuku holds up his pinky fingers. That's something Ashido had taught the little girl, and like most children, Eri had run with it. Izuku's fairly sure most of his class has a withstanding pinky promise with the little girl for something or another. Even Kacchan.

Eri wastes no time in hooking her own tiny pinky around his.

"Now, should we finish up out tea party and go find the adults?"

Eri nods once again, a tiny smile tilting onto her lips as she finally leans over to fill the last teacup. Oboro's teacup.

Izuku's perplexed now.

"Uh, Eri-chan?" ruby red eyes lift to him, "why are you putting tea in that cup?"

"It's for the guest," the little girl tells him seriously.

"Are you going to move the unicorn or Midnight over so everyone has a cup and a seat?"

"No," Eri cocks her head at Izuku before looking at the last chair, at Oboro, "someone already took that seat, 'zuku-nii. They need some tea. Unicorn and Midnight like sharing a seat."

What?

"W-who, um, who took the last seat?" Izuku asks, reining in the hammering of his heart. Oboro had gone completely still, wide eyes on Eri. They share a brief second of eye contact before both of them are refocusing on the little girl who's now making her way back to her own chair.

“I don’t know,” Eri shrugs, “but... someone’s there. I know it.”

“Do you see someone?”

“No.”

“Can you hear someone?”

“No?”

Izuku swallows, thumbing at the tiny teacup in his hand, “how do you know someone’s there then?”

Eri simply shrugs. “I just do. Now what do we do?”

Izuku thinks he mumbles something about enjoying the tea and chatting— then there’s something about pinky’s up and they’re both sipping at the tiny cups. Eri clumsily copies him, but Izuku’s eyes are caught on the ghost staring right back.

He doesn’t know what just happened, but he doesn’t draw any more attention to it.

Oboro remains seated, stiffly watching the tea party.

Izuku moves on autopilot when they finish their impromptu play-pretend party. He and Oboro trail along behind Eri as they find their way back to the kitchen. Eri says not a thing about the supposed guest in her room. She munches on a cookie Hizashi passes over and explains the concept of tea parties to the adults.

Izuku silently stews over what just happened.

It’s so strange he doesn’t even really know if it did happen.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again!

So, what did you think? The last part of this chapter was just something I thought was cool (and would freak our favorite boys out). It's believed that little kids are closer to the spiritual realm then adults are. I just thought the idea was cool since Kota also heard and saw Oboro. I like Eri being aware, but oblivious to what she's aware of. Also, fun fact, this idea is directly based on my older bother who used to talk to passed relatives when he was a toddler. Wild.

Anyways! It is once again late, and I need to go to sleep. As always, thank you so much for taking the time to read this, and I hope you enjoyed! Any and all comments are greatly appreciated, as are kudos! You guys are awesome <3

Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! I'm back once again with another new chapter!

I had a lot of fun with this chapter, even if it was supposed to be a lot shorter then it actually ended up being! It's sort of a filler, even though I think it needed to happen? That weird in between, you know?

Anyways, as always, I hope you enjoy! c:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Settling Eri into another dorm actually went a lot better than Izuku assumed it would've. He'd been a constant in her life since she was rescued from Chisaki, and he knows he himself was a little on edge at the thought of leaving her, even if he knew she'd be completely safe with Midnight.

It went better than Izuku was expecting, sure, but that doesn't mean Eri's first official night with Midnight had gone exactly to plan.

They'd spent the afternoon up with Nemuri and Eri in the woman's apartment. They ate dinner together and had cookies for dessert. They tried to keep it as normal as they could, even in a new setting. After that, they'd played a child-friendly board game that Shota and Hizashi had picked up, a game that Asui said her little brother and sister loved to play, and collectively let Eri win just to see her staring wide-eyed at her game piece on the finish square first.

Following that, Izuku had watched a couple episodes of the show Eri was currently enthralled by with her, trying to follow along. When had children's shows gotten so random? Izuku could distantly hear Shota and Hizashi explaining the bedtime routine they'd started adjusting Eri to, so Nemuri wouldn't be completely out of her depth on the first night together.

When she seemed relatively comfortable in the apartment, and with Nemuri, Shota, Hizashi and Izuku had gone back to the 1-A dorms for the night, silently hoping for the best as Nemuri and Eri were left to their own devices.

And they hadn't heard anything for a while.

Until night fell.

Izuku was down in his dorm for the first time in a little over a week, when there was a light rapping of knuckles on his dorm door.

He wasn't busy; just reading a JSL sign book and practicing along to it. Oboro was with him too, settled right beside Izuku on the bed, reading along and showing him proper finger placements and gesturing as they read along together. He'd left the book on his bed as he made his way to the door, pulling it open expecting to find one of his classmates on the other side, but was surprised to find Hizashi standing sheepishly on the other side.

He'd just seen the man an hour ago— maybe two if it was later then he thought and... usually his guardians text him if something's happening. He hadn't heard his phone go off, nor had it lit up where it was sat on the bed beside the book.

"Is everything okay?" Izuku asks hesitantly, glancing quickly back at Oboro, who looks just as confused as Izuku feels. He looks back at Hizashi, frowning.

"Yes," Hizashi answers before hesitating, "but also kinda no..."

Izuku blinks, "what?"

Hizashi lets out a sigh, scratching at his hairline, "Nemuri just called," the man tells him softly, "Eri's just a little scared to sleep in her new room. I guess she spent a lot of time alone when she was with Chisaki. Nem said she offered to sleep in there with her but... Eri keeps asking for you."

"She does?" Izuku asks in surprise and then his surprise falls to heartbreak at the thought of Eri being scared, "she... she is?"

Hizashi offers a small, sad smile, "we'd sorta expected this. She went from isolation, to being surrounded by figures she deemed safe, to a new guardian who she knows and likes, but who doesn't quite provide that same level of comfort. And a new room is a big, scary change; especially on that first night. Nem was just wondering if you'd be willing to have a bit of a sleepover with Eri, y'know, to break her new room in, ya'dig? Sleeping in there with you by her side might show her it's okay— that it's safe."

Hizashi pauses, biting hesitantly at his bottom lip, "but don't feel obligated to go, Kiddo. I'm not here to pressure you; I'm just here to

keep you in the loop. We know you're back to school tomorrow, and if you're not feelin' staying over at the 2-GenEd dorms, or if you want some time to get ready for tomorrow, we can handle it. Nem can use her Quirk on Eri-chan if worse comes to worst— it is falling asleep that the hardest part. Still, it's up to you."

"I want to help," Izuku tells his guardian without much thought. "She's scared and if me being there will help her settle in, I don't mind sleeping on her floor. Besides," Izuku rubs sheepishly at the back of his neck, "I've been sleeping on the floor since she started staying with us, right? What's one more night?"

"You're such a nice kid," Hizashi tells him kindly, reaching a hand up to ruffle through green curls, "I'm sure Nem and Eri will both appreciate this, Sunshine. That little girl really looks up to you."

"I'd do anything for Eri," Izuku tells Hizashi, before biting his lip guiltily. He had almost moved out of the apartment without his guardian's knowledge for her, he supposes, and if by the way Hizashi winces slightly, he must be thinking the same thing. "And... I always liked sleepovers when I was little. I was usually going to Kacchan's house, but it was always fun. Maybe if we make Eri's room into something fun, she'll feel more comfortable?"

"Worth a shot," Hizashi agrees, thankfully brushing off Izuku's comment. "Nem was hoping to start getting Eri on an earlier sleeping schedule since she'll be waking up earlier too. You up for that?"

"I could sleep," Izuku grins. "I'll just bring my phone with me. I can keep myself distracted until I fall asleep. I am pretty tired though. I can change into pajamas now and head over to the 2-GenEd dorms. I'll have time to come back to my dorm and get changed into my uniform and grab my stuff before classes start."

"Sounds like a plan," Hizashi smiles softly, "text Sho or I if you need us—or talk to Nem. She'll take good care of you. You are doing her a favor."

"I'll be fine," Izuku huffs fondly.

Hizashi laughs, patting Izuku on the head like he's a pet or something. "Alright, alright. Just hurry up before curfew. I'm sure Nezu would not be happy to see students out of their dorms after hours. Nem said she left the stairwell door unlocked for you, so you shouldn't run into any problems. Just give one of us a call if you do, alright?"

“I will,” Izuku chimes with a bow of head. “Goodnight, ‘zashi. And, um, pass it on to Shota too?”

“Will do,” Hizashi’s smile softens. “Have a good night. Good luck with Eri-chan, Kiddo.”

Hizashi leaves after that, and Izuku is quick to change into comfy clothes. He tugs his All Might sweater over his head and slips his toothbrush, toothpaste, phone charger and phone into the pouch pocket. He doesn’t think he needs anything else, and it’s unlikely Nemuri wouldn’t have anything he may need.

With everything sorted out— his uniform laid out for quick dressing and his school bag packed up and ready to be grabbed in the morning, Izuku pulls his door shut behind him and heads to the stairs with a cold presence following after him.

“I love sleepovers,” Oboro tells him as they head towards the stairs. “Sho, ‘zashi and I used to have them all the time— usually at mine or ‘zashi’s place. I doubt this one’ll be like those though, probably just trying to get Eri-chan comfortable enough so she’ll fall asleep. Not as much fun. You and I should have a sleepover! That would be epic!”

“We have sleepovers every night,” Izuku snorts as he makes his way down the steps.

“No,” the ghost pouts, “we’re just in the same room at night. You sleep like a boring person, and I read all night. I mean like we have popcorn, and sodas, and eat candy and watch movies!”

“I sleep like a regular, alive person,” Izuku corrects with a huff. He pauses when he reaches the bottom of the stairwell, turning back to look at the ghost, “we can have a sleepover if you want though. Sounds fun. Even though you can’t really eat, or drink. Not, uh, y’know, normally? We can still watch movies.”

“Awesome! Sleepover!” Oboro grins.

Izuku snorts a laugh, shaking his head at Oboro’s antics as he finally pushes the door open and steps into the common area. He sees a couple of his peers— Todoroki, and Hitoshi. Yaoyorozu, Iida, Jirou, Kaminari and Shoji.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki is the first to spot him, calling him to attention.

The rest of his peers glance over too. Izuku hesitates before making a

beeline towards the table where everyone is sitting. He hopes Eri doesn't mind waiting a bit longer, it would be rude to just ignore his friends.

"Midoriya-kun!" Yaoyorozu smiles kindly, "Jirou, Kaminari, Iida, Shoji and I were just going to play a round of cards, would you like to play too? The more the merrier!"

"We're watching," Hitoshi chimes in from where he's sitting at the table too but looking a bit reserved at being surrounded by 1-A kids. He's still getting used to being a part of a close-knit class. Still, his hands are tucked in the pockets of his sweatshirt, and he's slouched back against the chair.

"I don't know how to play," Todoroki explains with a perplexed blink as Shoji shuffles the cards. "I hope I understand enough to play the next round."

"I just don't want to play," Hitoshi shrugs.

Hitoshi doesn't really look like he wants to be here, but Kaminari, who is sitting on his knees bouncing in the chair next to him excitedly, must be the reason Hitoshi is even entertaining the idea. Kaminari, like Izuku, just has that natural charm that draws in even the most *Hitoshi* of people.

Kaminari is the second 1-A kid to actually manage to befriend Hitoshi without help.

Izuku is just glad his friend is putting in the effort to get to know their classmates now that he's a 1-A student too. They really lucked out with how kind everyone in the class is, and they're all great friends to have if you put in the effort. School is a lot more fun when you're not always alone.

"Thanks for the offer," Izuku shakes his head apologetically, "I really wish I could, but I was just on my way out."

"Out?" Iida questions, looking up sharply, "it's almost dorm curfew. Is Sensei aware of this? Are you planning to be back by curfew? We shouldn't be causing any problems, especially right before classes are due to continue."

"I know," Izuku answers lightly, shooting his friend in the know a knowing look, "he is, and no, I won't be back by curfew. Sensei already approved of it."

Iida looks like he's about to short-circuit at Izuku's answers, despite the mention of Shota approving— or at least Izuku hopes the man knows what's going on... maybe he should've clarified with Hizashi. Oboro is laughing by the door where he's waiting, and Izuku feels a bit bad about his friend being worried about him and their class, and Shota by extension too.

"Relax, class Prez, hear the guy out before jumping on him," Jirou says, glancing at Izuku before Iida can say anything else. "So, where are you off to then, Midoriya?"

"Well... you guys know how Eri was moved into the 2-GenEd dorms since Midnight-Sensei took over as her guardian?" Izuku gets some nods, which he expected. It is common knowledge at this point. The class had gathered to send her off just that afternoon, even though she was just going five minutes away. "Eri-chan is just a little scared of her new room, so Midnight-Sensei asked if I was willing to stay with her for the night since I was staying with Eri and Aizawa-Sensei upstairs when Sensei was her caretaker. She has a bit of an attachment, I think."

"Aw, so the little dear misses you?" Yaoyorozu coos, "that's so sweet."

"I guess," Izuku shrugs sheepishly, trying to ignore the flush he feels crawling up his cheeks at Yaoyorozu's tone. He's definitely blushing hard, as Hitoshi grins teasingly when Izuku glances at his friend. "She's just a bit scared and... after the raid I guess she and I bonded a bit."

"That's so cute," Jirou teases, grinning sharply when she notices that he flushes at praise. "I could tell she liked you just by how tightly she was holding your hand before she left. You're a comforting person."

"It was so very cute how taken she was with you," Yaoyorozu agrees, face soften like she's imaging the world's cutest thing, "I know when we moved into the dorms it was a big change for me! I assume it's the opposite for poor Eri-chan; my room was far smaller than I was used to, but knowing what she came from... this must be so scary for her."

Izuku nods as that sadness tightens around his heart again, "yeah," he agrees hollowly, swallowing down the heartbreak, "I just don't know how to really help her adjust, you know? I can't... she can't be dependent on me. I won't always be able to sleepover with her, not when school starts back up and we've got homework and training... but I hate the thought of her being scared and wanting me when I

can't be there."

"She does really like you," Hitoshi frowns, almost sympathetic, "that's what you get for being so damn charming."

Izuku gapes at his friend in surprise, "how did you make a compliment sound a like an insult?"

"Natural talent," the purple-haired boy offers a tooth, sarcastic smile. Jirou snorts a laugh, and even Yaoyorozu looks amused. Hitoshi seems to find the table very interesting after making the girls laugh. Hitoshi clears his throat after a second, "...anyways, don't you have somewhere to be, 'zuku?"

"Yes!" Oboro answers, huffing like an annoyed toddler, "we do! Don't forget curfew, dude, Shota will be pissed if you're caught out past curfew again, no matter why you're out. If Nezu sees you, and that rat definitely *will*, it's Sho's ass he'll be going after."

"Right," Izuku nods, answering both Hitoshi and Oboro. "Uh, yeah, I do... um, Sensei will be very unhappy if I don't make it to the Gen-Ed dorms before curfew. I'm sure Midnight-Sensei is wondering where I am..."

"Ah, sorry for keeping you," Yaoyorozu frowns apologetically. "Eri and Midnight-Sensei must be waiting on you."

"No!" Izuku yelps, shaking his head furiously, "I mean, um, yes, they probably are, I guess, but it's only been a second! I knew what I was doing when I stopped to talk to you guys! It's fine, really, I wanted to talk to you all anyways, and it would be rude to just ignore you— I just, um, I do need to get going—"

"We get it," Jirou huffs fondly, shooing Izuku away playfully, "get lost, Midoriya. You've got somewhere to be. And at this rate curfew for our rooms will come before we even get through one game."

"Tell Eri 'hi' for us!" Kaminari grins. "We'll totally need to get Sensei's permission to host her here again! A whole class sleepover! Totally unfair only Midoriya gets to hang out with Eri-chan tonight!"

"Not sure a traumatized little girl's dependency on him is something is really he wants to brag about," Hitoshi rolls his eyes, but there's no malice in the action or words. Kaminari still puckers his lips in offense.

“Yeah, guess not,” Kaminari agrees finally, letting out a puff of breath that has him deflating, “poor Eri. But, still, it was nice having Eri-chan around! I think she’d like it— we could even invite Togata-Senpai and the rest of the ‘Big Three’! I’d like Hado-Senpai coming to visit our class again!”

“I’m sure you would, *Romeo*,” Jirou teases as she sends her earphone jack snapping out to jab against Kaminari’s wrist playfully.

“Not cool!” Kaminari pouts, rubbing at his wrist, “I was just sayin’... y’know, cause Eri-chan likes Togata-Senpai like she likes Midoriya, right? And we can’t just invite Togata, y’know? That would be totally not cool. It’s not because she’s pretty, I mean, she *is* pretty, obviously, but that’s not why— I mean, we should invite her for Eri’s sake, not because she’s—”

“Uh huh,” Jirou rolls her eyes. “We get it.”

“Really digging yourself into a hole there, Kaminari,” Hitoshi snorts out under his breath as he sips at his coffee. He’d better hope Shota doesn’t catch him with that so late. The problem with having your uncle as your dorm guardian and homeroom teacher means Shota knows, and will enforce, Yua’s rules. Not that Shota wouldn’t scold any of them for drinking coffee so late in the evening. “Quit while you’re ahead, dude.”

“Anyways,” Kaminari huffs out, “I just thought it would be fun.”

“It would,” Izuku agrees, feeling sorry for Kaminari. There’s nothing wrong with having a crush on their upperclassman, so long as he’s respectful about it. “I’m sure Eri would love that. She just needs to settle in first, but I’m sure we can run it by Aizawa-Sensei—”

“Run what by Aizawa-Sensei?”

Izuku swirls around to face the door, where Shota had just announced his presence. He can just faintly see the man as he kicks off his uniform boots in the genkan. The man’s voice carries, and Izuku wonders how long he’s been listening in, going completely undetected.

“Oh, uh—”

“A party of sorts,” Iida takes responsibility easily, telling their teacher as the man finally joins them in the kitchen area, hands tucked in his pockets and eyes tired, “for Eri-chan. Kaminari suggested we have a small party for her, and Midoriya advised that we give Eri-chan some

time to settle before bringing it up. What are your thoughts on the matter, Sensei? Would a party be acceptable?"

"I don't care what you guys do so long as you don't wreck anything," the man shrugs. "Problem Child has a point though. Eri needs time to resettle with Midnight before we bring her back to what she knows here. That's confusing for a child in her situation. If you miss her, you're welcome to visit her. She'll be starting a homeschooling curriculum during the school week, so she'll be around. And I'm sure Midnight wouldn't mind visitors after hours if you clear it with her first.

"As Eri's legal guardian, anything you do plan will need to go through Midnight, so I'm not the person to ask anyways." The man pauses, looking around at his students before settling his gaze on Izuku, "speaking of, weren't you on your way out, Midoriya? Midnight is expecting you."

"R-right!" Izuku bows quickly before turning on his heels and heading towards where Oboro is snickering at his expense. "Um, good night, guys. And... and good night, Sensei!"

There's a cheerful chorus of goodnights in return from his peers, and Shota waves him off easily. Izuku leaves the room with a small wave as he steps into the genkan to slip into his sneakers.

The walk to the 2-GenEd dorms is relatively quiet, even with Oboro at Izuku's side. The ghost keeps pace but doesn't say much.

It's when their destination is in sight that Oboro finally speaks, "ya know," Oboro calls his attention, slipping his hands into the pockets of his uniform pants, "hanging out with you is like going shopping with my mom, y'know, where she finds someone she knows and starts talking and it feels like we're standing there for hours? I'm having flashbacks to ten-year-old me staring at lettuce in the produce section while my mom chats with someone she knows for half an hour."

Izuku snorts a laugh as he walks, "I take offense to that. I couldn't just walk away, they're my friends too and it would be rude. And, you know, you're a ghost. You're just lucky I'm weird and can see and hear you. And you know why I don't talk to you around adults."

"I am lucky you're weird and can see and hear me," Oboro agrees fondly, "it's not weird though— it's really cool. I'd still like you even if I wasn't a ghost demanding your attention because you're the first

person in literal years to acknowledge me."

"If you weren't a ghost, our friendship would be weird. I'm pretty sure our friendship would freak Shota and Hizashi out even if you weren't a ghost. I mean, you're like thirty—"

"You say as if thirty is old," Oboro pouts. "Thirty is not old."

"It is when you're sixteen," Izuku reasons lightly. "You're old enough to have kids, you know. And it wouldn't even be weird. I don't even graduate for another two years."

"Oh, God, my best friends *do* have a kid— they have a teenager," Oboro wheezes out, like this is a realization to him, "I'm an uncle to a teenager. Jeez, thirty *is* old. I'm *older* then thirty! I'm an old man, Izuku. You're just a baby, man!"

"Don't say *that*, and you are not my uncle," Izuku hisses under his breath as they arrive at the 2-GenEd dorm building. Izuku rounds the building, and just like Hizashi had said, the hidden door around back does click open when he tries it. "And, technically, I'm adopted. You guys would've been around fifteen when I was born, so a bit young."

Izuku doesn't realize what he'd said until Oboro is grinning widely.

"Not that I-I'm adopted or anything, because they're *fostering* me!" Izuku yelps under his breath. He's aware that they're now in a dorm building that's fast-approaching curfew. Plus, with school starting back up tomorrow, everyone'll be preparing for that, and he doesn't want to disturb them. He also doesn't want to be caught shouting at nothing. "I was just making a point that-that they're too young to be my dads unless—"

"They were getting *real* lucky as teenagers."

"Exactly," Izuku breathes out before the horror sets in when the ghost's words actually catch up to him, "wait, no! No, no, no, that is not what I meant! I do not want to think about that. We are not talking about— a-about them— Gross, Oboro, no, you can't just— they're my— ugh! You can't say things like that!"

"Okay, okay," the ghost is laughing hysterically, hardly even able to get the words out, "I get it, you talking about your dads like that is weird. Even though they're my best friends and it's completely natural for me to do it. And as my best, and only, friend who can communicate with me, you're subject to it. I guess I'll let it go for your

sake, man. But... before I do that, I just want you to know that neither of those shy, oblivious blockheads were getting' *anything* in high school. They were not, in fact, *lucky*."

"I didn't need to know that. I really didn't need to know that," Izuku dry washes his face as embarrassment settles in his cheeks, "you made it worse. How did you manage to make this conversation worse? You're the worst, you know that, right? The absolute worst."

"So I've been told," the ghost laughs openly, keeping pace with Izuku even when he speeds up in an attempt to leave the ghost on the stairs. "Now, c'mon, Eri-chan's been waiting for us!"

"Yeah, alright," Izuku drags his hands down his face before tucking his hands in his pockets as he sets up the stairs, "and they're *not* my dads."

"Whatever you say~"

"Sometimes I wonder why I even talk to you."

When they finally make it up to the apartment, Izuku is surprised by how quickly the door is pulled open when he knocks.

Nemuri looks a little frazzled—

She lets out an exhale of relief, offering Izuku a small smile as she gestures him in. He's led into the apartment, and into the living room where a very tired, yet very wide-awake Eri sits watching an old children's film Izuku hazily remembers watching over at Kacchan's house when he was very little.

The little girl lights up as soon as she sees him, and Izuku feels bad for Nemuri, who just smiles sadly at him, and then the little girl as Eri fights her way out of the blanket she'd been wrapped up in and pads quickly towards him.

He doesn't hesitate to heft the little girl into his arms, returning the embrace when little arms wrap around his neck. He catches Nemuri smiling softly at them, though there is a distant sadness in her eyes.

Izuku does a bedtime routine with Eri and Nemuri, and tries not to feel awkward. It's generally something he does alone, or in the communal bathrooms in the dorms, so being in a tight space with them is a bit out of his comfort zone.

Eri and Nemuri are both already wearing pajamas as well, so Eri is ready to brush her teeth with Izuku. They head into the bathroom together, and Eri insists on holding his hand when they come out.

Nemuri waits in Eri's room, perched on the edge of the bed.

"Eri and I put the futon together for you when we heard you were coming to sleep in her room with her," Nemuri tells him, gesturing to a nicely made-up futon just a step or so away from Eri's bed. Izuku is oddly touched that he's not sleeping on the floor. "Eri-chan was such a big help! She picked out the blankets and sheets!"

"And, I found a kitty for you," Eri tells him proudly, breaking away from him and marching to the futon. She drops onto her knees where he picks up a black and white stuffed cat, holding it up for him to see. "It looks like yours from your room, so can sleep good too. Nemmie says it's nice to have something to cuddle at night."

Izuku hears a distant snort coming from the corner of the room where Oboro is sitting, perched on a toy chest, before looking back at Nemuri, who shrugs innocently.

Izuku blinks at the woman before looking back at Eri, expression softening, "thank you, Eri. It does look like mine, doesn't it? It's perfect."

The little girl offers a tiny smile.

She doesn't smile a lot— not like Izuku remembers beaming when he was little. He doesn't know if that's just who Eri is, or if it's just... not an expression she knows. He's making it his mission to make her smile. A real smile.

"There's a kitty that looks like Sushi too," the girl tells him, now moving towards her bed. Nemuri helps her up, but Eri, for the most part, does it independently. She'd been the same way at their apartment, so Izuku's not worried about that. He kneels on the futon as Eri searches through the new pile of stuffed animals on the bed before she finally shows him a plush that does resemble Sushi. From what he's seen at last. "He comes in here, in-in my room— Nemmie and I coloured, and Sushi was under the table. He tickled my toes."

"His whiskers are tickly, aren't they?" Nemuri's smile has gotten a little more calm and natural as the little girl settles down. "Now that 'zuku-nii is here, how about that story I was going to read, huh? Everyone got you lots of books to read. We can read a new on every

night!”

“I love stories,” Izuku adds as he gets under his own covers.

Nemuri reads a story, and Izuku enjoys it a lot more than he thought he would’ve.

He immerses himself in the story and enjoys Eri’s tiny reactions and rapt fascination as she looks through the pictures with Nemuri. He’s content sitting crisscross on the bed with Oboro sitting at his side listening along too.

He tries to keep himself distant while still being a part of everything whenever the little girl looks over for reassurance. He doesn’t comment, or add anything unless Eri asks him directly, and for the most part, she almost forgets he’s there, which he’s glad about.

When the book is finished, Eri lays down in the bed, and even lets Nemuri tuck her in slightly. She clutches the unicorn to her chest, but still looks nervous as she glances around the room, even with Izuku laying on the floor beside her.

When Nemuri leaves the room, she leaves it open ajar. A nightlight in the corner of the room flickers to life. Izuku stares up at the ceiling. He’s pretty sure she heads into her bedroom across the hall.

It’s quiet for a couple minutes— quiet enough that Izuku thinks Eri might’ve fallen asleep.

“’zuku-nii?” comes a soft voice.

Her voice is quiet, whispered like she’s nervous he’s asleep and doesn’t want to wake him. His heart melts at her tone, and when he turns his head a little, he can see her trying to look down at him without making too much noise, maybe to see if he’s asleep or not.

He shifts on the futon, thumbing at the ear of the cat plush laying on his chest, “yeah, Eri-chan?”

She doesn’t reply, but he does feel her gaze on him.

He cards his fingers through his hair as he pushes himself up so he’s sitting. The cat stuffed toy falls into the gap he makes between his knees as he crosses his legs, “why are you scared?”

Eri shifts too, matching his position except she’s clutching the unicorn

to her chest. The little girl is quiet for another long second, and Izuku doesn't push. "What if... what if he comes back? O-Overhaul..."

"He won't," Izuku assures quietly, making sure to keep his voice calm and understanding. "He's in prison. That's when... you know how he... how he kept you hidden? And you couldn't leave? That's sorta like prison, except you didn't *deserve* what he did to you— Overhaul *does* deserve to go to prison for what he did to you. He's been put somewhere he can't use his Quirk to hurt anyone, and he'll be there for a very long time for what he did. For how he hurt you."

"How do you know?" Eri asks, voice so soft he almost doesn't hear it.

"Well..." Izuku bites his lip. He wants to tell her that's just what happens when criminals are caught after doing unspeakable things, but Eri wouldn't really understand that. "The Heroes promised he was going somewhere he couldn't hurt anyone ever again. Remember the Heroes you met that day? Sir Nighteye and Eraserhead. Lemillion—"

"Deku," Eri adds quietly, red eyes almost shining in the light from the nightlight.

"Yeah," Izuku bites back the smile, "me too. I'm not really a Hero yet, but Sir was, and Eraserhead is. Everyone worked hard to stop Overhaul and all the other bad guys who worked for him, and to rescue you. Do you know why they're Heroes, Eri-chan?"

The little girl shakes her head silently.

"They're Heroes because they want to help people. Like how they helped you and... and how they helped me. Heroes save people. They protect people. I know everything is scary right now, but you're safe here. I trust Eraserhead when he says Overhaul was locked up somewhere he can't hurt anyone. And... I trust that they'll keep us safe. Eraserhead, Hizashi and Nemmie; all the grown-ups at this school. And all the student too, like Lemillion, Hado-chan, Tamaki-kun and all our friends in 1-A."

"I trust you, 'zuku-nii," the little girl offers like it's a secret, and Izuku tries to ignore the fond swell in his heart. "And Lemillion too. You saved me."

"We all saved you," Izuku corrects gently, "Lemillion and I needed help so we could help you, so we asked Heroes we trusted, and they made sure we all got out safe, right? If we can trust them, you can trust them, alright? No one will let Overhaul hurt you ever again,

okay?”

“What about Sir?” the little girl asks, face now buried in her knees and the unicorn plush.

Izuku draws in a breath, sending a glance back at Oboro. The ghost had remained silent— they're both still a bit on edge after Eri was able to sense Oboro’s presence.

“Sometimes,” Izuku starts, choosing his words carefully. He’s not prepared for the little girl to really understand the idea of mortality. “Sometimes bad things happen and... you don’t get better. Sir Nighteye got hurt very badly by Overhaul and... there wasn’t anything anyone could do to help him. Sometimes people get really hurt, or they get very sick, or a lot of the time they get old and sometimes they don’t get to stay with us because of it. Sometimes people die. Sir Nighteye died, Eri.”

“Oh,” the little girl breathes out, eyebrows furrowing as if trying to understand, “Lemillion was really sad... When he came and visited me in the hospital. He was *smiling*, but he was *sad*.”

Izuku remembers Togata coming to visit Eri.

She’d just regained consciousness after her fever broke, and it had only been a day since Sir Nighteye passed away. He’d come into the room that first time with a bright smile that hadn’t reached his eyes, a façade that was crumbling as the minutes went by.

He hadn’t stayed long, leaving the room as his eyes started to water, and his smile turned wobbly.

“She’s... very empathetic,” Oboro says slowly as Izuku tries to figure out how to continue. He really should’ve expected Eri to be perceptive. She’d been compassionate when they’d met her too, scared out of her mind but going willingly with her abuser to protect them.

“Lemillion really liked Sir Nighteye,” Izuku tells the little girl, looking up towards the ceiling thoughtfully. “He was a mentor to him; a teacher. When you lose someone like that, it... well, sometimes it takes some time to really understand your feelings. We were all sad that he died, but we were also... we were *happy* you were safe, and that you were okay. That was our goal; mine, Lemillion’s, Sir Nighteye’s, and every Hero there’s too. Lemillion just... he didn’t want you to think he was sad, so he smiled. Sometimes you can feel a lot of different emotions at once.”

Once again, Eri is quiet while she processes the explanation.

“My grandpa died,” Eri offers gently after a second of silence. Izuku blinks, dropping his attention from the ceiling and onto the little girl, who is staring down into the eyes of her unicorn toy, “that’s why Overhaul was taking care of me. I miss him a lot. I was really sad too.”

“I’m sure he really loves you, Eri,” Izuku tells her softly.

He thinks back to the raid. He hadn’t seen any ghosts besides Oboro, none that he could tell was a ghost, but also no one who looked like they could be a grandfather either. Though, when he really thinks about it, it really hadn’t felt like the girl was entirely alone either when they’d found her.

He’d gotten the same feeling when he’d first met Eri, but… he’d assumed it was the echoes.

It wasn’t exactly the kind of ghost stuff he usually experienced, but there definitely was a strong adoration that settled in his chest when they’d found Eri. Stronger than he probably should’ve felt for a little girl who, at the time, he’d only known for maybe half an hour, if that. He hadn’t acknowledged it then, didn’t even really think about it really, but now…

Could it have been her grandfather maybe?

A ghost he couldn’t see, or hear, but was there all the same? Someone pushing a wave of adoration onto him over a little girl he’d never met before? If ghosts themselves weren’t impossible, then the idea of it wasn’t that far-fetched.

“He did,” Eri tells him, burying her nose in the unicorn’s fur, “I ‘member he always told me. Never said I was a curse like everyone else.”

“You’re not a curse,” Izuku swallows down the rage he feels for anyone who’d told this sweet little girl that she was a curse, “you just never had anyone teach you how to use your Quirk. Mine was hard to use too, when I first got it. It takes time, and we all have accidents.”

“Mine hurts people,” Eri tells him, voice muffled by the toy.

“Mine hurt *me*,” Izuku lets out a sheepish little laugh. “But the more I practiced, and the more I started to understand it, the better I got. The more control I had. You… shouldn’t have to be afraid of your Quirk,

Eri. It's not a curse— you used it to help me, remember? A curse wouldn't do that, and I couldn't have beat Overhaul without you, Eri-chan."

Eri lifts her face up from the plush, eyebrows furrowed as she studies him from across the room.

"You don't have to if you don't want," Izuku starts carefully, "but I'm sure someone here could help you with your Quirk. Hizashi has a really hard to control Quirk too, so he'd be able to help you understand how to control yours, and Shota can stop your Quirk if it starts hurting people. Is that something you'd like to try?"

Eri looks at him for a second longer before looking away towards the door, "maybe."

Izuku knows better than to push any further, especially tonight. He knows he wasn't invited to stay with Eri for them to stay up all night, but if doing it one night means she'll feel better about it every other night, he's sure no one will mind.

He knows Nemuri had gone to bed by now—the apartment outside the bedroom is dark, and he doesn't hear a tv or anything. He wonders what time it really is but doesn't want to look at his phone.

"Izuku-nii..." Eri's voice is quiet again, but it's nervous now, "you're not... gonna leave, are you?"

Izuku swallows, staring hard at the ceiling, "not tonight, no," he tells her, "but tomorrow I have to go to class and I can't keep staying the night with you."

"Why...?" the little girl asks in a tone that breaks his heart.

"I just... can't," Izuku bites his lip, "I can't keep sleeping by you, Eri. I have a schedule I need to follow, and I wake up super early a lot of the time. I have my own room and I think... my friends are starting to miss me. I can't come here every night, and you can't come stay with me either."

He has been spending most of his time with Eri, and he knows all his friends understand why, but that doesn't stop him from feeling guilty when they invite him to do things, but he's too busy worrying about Eri. Even today, when he was invited to play cards with everyone.

He wants to keep everyone happy, but there is only one of him.

Shota had been right, Izuku realizes. None of them have the time or mentality to always be what she needs, when she needs it. They're busy: with school and social lives and Quirks.

He understands now that they can't be the *constant* she needs.

"I... like having 'zuku-nii with me," Eri admits softly, turning her face away from him. "Not as scary. You protect me."

"There's nothing to be scared of, Eri-chan," Izuku whispers, watching her even though he knows she's not looking in his direction. "You're safe in your room, and Nemuri will protect you. You're safe here. And I'm only a couple buildings over, right? If anything happened and you *really* needed me, I'd come for you so fast, okay?"

He hesitates, "but only if you *really* need me. Really really. We'll still see each other loads though, okay? I'll still come over to see you all the time, and we can arrange sleepovers too, if you'd like but... you need to be here with Nemuri and I... I need to be home with my class and Shota and Hizashi."

Eri looks back at him, studies him hard in a way that makes her look years older yet also young and childlike. It's not exactly a good look on a little girl. "Izuku-nii misses his friends?"

"I do," Izuku tells her honestly, laying back on the futon. "I don't have a lot of spare time anymore, and I've been spending a lot of time making sure you're okay, and hanging out with you, which I love to do! You're allowed to need me, but I can't... always be around. I know you don't really understand that, and that's alright."

Eri is quiet again, and he's not really sure if she does understand this.

The dependency she had on him is a little overwhelming and he'd never want to hurt her, but he also knows he can't play into it like she needs. He really doesn't have the time between his classes, training, homework and personal time so he doesn't run himself into the ground.

There's no balance.

"I miss you when you're not here," Eri whispers.

Izuku's heart breaks all over again.

"I miss you too, Eri," he bites hard at his bottom lip, glaring up at the

ceiling. “You know... missing someone just means you’ll be even more excited when you finally see them again.”

Eri doesn’t respond, but he does feel her gaze on him. He refuses to look back at her. He doesn’t want to give in; can’t give in. He knows if he looks into her eyes he’ll say something dumb in an attempt to comfort her. She doesn’t need comforting promises that he can’t keep, she needs honesty and truth in a way she can understand.

“It’s not so bad sleeping alone,” Izuku tells her finally. “I do it a lot. And you have all these cuddly stuffed toys, remember what Nemmie said? Always nice to cuddle with something. And I bet Sushi would like to sleep in here with you if that's something you'd like. Fish liked sleeping with you.”

“I like ‘zuku-nii being here with me though.”

Izuku bites back a sigh, rubbing at his forehead. He angles his head to look back at Oboro, but the ghost looks just as lost as he feels. It’s like he’s taking one step forwards followed by three backwards in trying to comfort Eri.

“I know,” Izuku relents, knowing he won’t make any progress tonight. Eri is still too attached to him. She can’t understand this. All she knows is that Izuku makes her feel safe. “Why don’t we try to sleep? Just like back at the apartment with Shota and Hizashi, yeah?”

“Okay,” comes a meek little voice, followed by the ruffling of sheets as she turns onto her back.

It’s quiet once again.

Izuku listens to Eri’s breaths, but it doesn’t even out like it had been at the apartment. She isn’t falling asleep, and he’s starting to get worried.

Izuku thinks about asking her is there’s anything he could do to help her fall asleep, even if it’s against his better judgement when: “He’s ‘zuku-nii’s friend, right?”

“Who?” Izuku asks quietly, keeping his eyes shut.

They are supposed to be trying to sleep now.

“Him. Um, over there. He’s here now,” Eri says instead, “he was here when ‘zuku-nii was here playing tea party, then he left with ‘zuku-nii

and now he's back. He's your friend."

Izuku tenses up, eyes flicking open as he angles his head just enough to be able to see the ghost. Oboro is frozen in place once again, staring wide-eyed at Eri.

"Yeah," Izuku breathes out a breath of fear, "he's... my friend."

"Is he nice?" Eri asks calmly, as the bed sheets shift. Izuku pushes himself up onto his elbows, turning his attention to the little girl who's holding herself up on her elbows, head angled in the direction of the toy chest. "He was at my tea party too."

"He was," Izuku swallows, "yes, he's really nice. How do you... know he's a boy?"

"I don't know," Eri looks just as perplexed as Izuku feels, "I just do, I think."

"Okay, um," Izuku tries to ignore the anxious flutter of his heart, "what do you... think about him?"

"I think he's nice," Eri tells him honestly, "he came to my tea party and... I think he was there too. At, um, when you saved me. And... and he's gotta be nice if he's 'zuku-nii's friend. Is he my friend too?"

"Yes," Oboro croaks out from across the room.

Izuku can't even imagine what the ghost must be going through—another person acknowledging his presence after so long. Eri might just be a little girl, and he's not sure if she can sense Oboro because children are more spiritually connected, or because of what Chisaki did to her, but it's got to mean so much to someone who'd gone years in torturous isolation.

"He'd love to be your friend, Eri-chan," Izuku offers with a light smile. The curious, soft smile that lights up the little girl's face should not be as adorable as it is. "But right now, he wants us to go to sleep."

"I literally did not say that," Oboro groans, "you're an awful translator."

"Oh," the little girl hums out quietly, flopping back down onto her mattress. She settles on her stomach, tucking her arms under her pillow and resting her cheek down on the pillow almost like she's still looking at Oboro. "I forgot."

Eri shuts her eyes, and within a couple minutes her breathing evens out.

Izuku can't seem to fall asleep, thoughts now on the fact that someone else knows of Oboro's existence. And what's strangest to him is the fact Eri didn't even *question* it. Didn't ask for his name or ask how Izuku knew there was someone else in the room too. She didn't find his presence weird or freak out. Just quietly accepted it like it was the most normal thing in the world.

She didn't bat an eyelash about it.

Children are *weird*.

Izuku is... tired the following morning. Rightfully so.

By the time he actually fell asleep, it was the early hours of the morning. He just couldn't seem to quiet his thoughts. Thoughts of Oboro, and his classmates— Eri. He's sure he hadn't gotten more than an hour or two of sleep in the end.

Eri had woken up chipper and talkative, and he'd never felt more envious of a child. She'd told Nemuri all about the sleepover, leaving out the conversation topics entirely, which Izuku was grateful for.

Still, when asked if she was ready to sleep by herself in her new room, or have Nemuri sleep on the futon instead, she'd gone worryingly quiet, withdrawing into herself.

He really wants to help, but he knows this can't be a regular thing.

The last time he felt this tired was when he was living on the streets. He wants to be there for everyone, but it just... it isn't *fair* that he should have to feel like this. To be so exhausted he almost falls asleep just sitting down on his own bed after he's changed into his uniform that next morning.

It's going to one long, long day.

He's a bit late arriving at class. Not late that he's actually late, but later than he usually is. Everyone else has already arrived, and they're all seated and waiting for Shota to arrive and get homeroom started.

He all but collapses in his chair and instantly lets his forehead thump onto the desktop.

He's so tired.

"Rough night?"

Izuku groans at the sound of Hitoshi's voice, lifting his head and lulling his attention back, "I didn't sleep at all," he admits. "She was so scared, and *I'm* scared she's going to want to do it again tonight. I'm glad she's comfortable, but I won't make it. I don't even know how I'm going to get through today..."

"Actually..." Izuku angles his head to look around Hitoshi and back at Yaoyorozu, who'd spoken, "I... might've thought of something that might help Eri-chan feel more comfortable without you around..."

"You have?" Izuku perks up slightly, "what did you think of? At this point, I'll try anything, and I'm sure Midnight-Sensei agrees. After last night I think this is almost a bit... unhealthy."

"Well," Yaoyorozu bites her lip nervously. She turns to her backpack, speaking as she does so, "I got to thinking about what you said after curfew last night and I thought... well, you're comforting to her and she wants you around, even though logically you can't always be there but... what if you could?"

Izuku doesn't have time to question what that means as Yaoyorozu pulls something from her bag and holds it out to him past Hitoshi. And it's... is that *him*? The little stuffed Izuku has fluffy green felt hair, and freckles sewn in. The toy's eyes are the same green as his own, but more cartoony. It's wearing a pretty accurate depiction of his Hero costume with the hood down.

"Awh, Yaomomo!" Ashido calls from across the room, standing up to peer over all the desks at the toy now in Izuku's hands, "it's adorable! And it looks just like him!"

"Creepy Deku voodoo doll," Kacchan snaps under his breath, "that kid's insane if she likes that thing."

"Aye, jealousy is not a pretty colour on you, *Kacchan*," Hitoshi sneers, glaring at the ashen-haired teen. "Mad *Deku* got merch before *King Explosion Murder*?"

Kacchan grits his teeth but doesn't retaliate.

As happy Izuku is that there's someone sticking up for him and trying to keep Kacchan in line, he's also glad Kacchan doesn't rise to the bait.

He's really not in the mood to break up a fight.

"I just figured she might like something that resembles you if she can't have the real thing. It was easy to make— cotton fabric was one of the first molecular structures I learned when I got my Quirk, and I've always been good at sewing. You... do so much for us all, Midoriya-kun, I wanted to try and help you out. I hope it's not weird..."

"It's not," Izuku stares down at the doll. Okay, it is a little weird. But it's no different than regular Hero merch, like the Midnight doll Eri already has. It's just wird that it's him. It's a good thing it'll be a while before there's any official Deku merch, because he'll need some time to wrap his head around accepting this. "Thank you, Yaoyorozu. I think... no, I'm sure Eri will love this."

"The resemblance is uncanny, 'zuku," Oboro chimes, looking over his shoulder at the toy.

"I just hope you can get a bit of a break with the Deku toy keeping her company," the Yaoyorozu offers a gentle smile from her seat, "you look exhausted, Midoriya-kun."

Izuku snorts a tired laugh, nodding his head, "I hope you're right, because I really am."

That afternoon, Izuku brings Yaoyorozu with him to give Eri the toy.

She absolutely adores it, hugging it right to her chest as she hugs both Yaoyorozu and Izuku each.

Izuku sleeps like the dead that night without a word from his guardians or Nemuri. He doesn't hear anything about the little girl until he gets a text of '*Success!!*', along with a picture of Eri sleeping soundly with the Deku doll clutched tightly to her chest from Hizashi while he's getting ready for his morning run.

Izuku smiles to himself at the adorable photo, saving it to his phone.

Success indeed.

Eri and Midnight drop by the dorm the following afternoon after school. Eri smiles adorably as she beelines right to where Izuku, Yaoyorozu and a couple other classmates are working on their homework. She pulls herself into his lap, clutching her Midnight and Deku dolls to her chest as she asks Yaoyorozu to make her a *Lemillion* one too.

Chapter End Notes

And we've reached the end of another chapter! I hope that wasn't to filler-y. I wanted to take a bit of a closer look at the heartbreaking bond they have after spending so much time together. A little kid like Eri would definitly cling to a comfort figure, and I like Izuku realizing things on his own, and Eri actually being a child with fears and emotions and trauma after what happened to her. Angsty and fluffy.

So, we're on our way towards the Joint Training Arc, which I've been excited about :D Now, a question for you guys, would you like to see anything from the School Festival Arc? I was just going to breeze through it, but if there's anything fluffy you guys want to see, drop a comment and I'll try to make it happen!

Oh, and before I forget, I made a YSG universe sickfic! It's really just some fluff between Izuku, Oboro, Sho and 'zashi. You might not have seen it if you're not subscribed to me, or the *A Boy and his Ghost* series, but it's there and I absolutely love how it turned out! It's called Midoriya Izuku Does Not Get Sick if you wanted to check that one out!

Anyways, as always! I hope you liked the update, and thank you so much for taking the time to read! I appreciate you all! Comments and kudos are greatly appreciated, and I look forward to reading your guy's thoughts on the chapter! Thanks once again <3

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello! Welcome back!

I had fun with this chapter! Once again I only skimmed through the Wiki and a the last performance episode just to fact check a bit, so expect differences!

Also! As a side note, if you find words missing an 'e', it is completely my laptop's fault. It's deciding to give up on that specific key and often times doesn't pick up on it when I type fast. I tried to keep a look out while editing, but, y'know.

Anyways! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eri settled in with Midnight slowly but surely after that sleepover and the introduction of the Deku and Lemillion stuffed toys. She still had bad nights, according to Hizashi and Shota, at least, who acted as buffers between Nemuri and Izuku, but he hadn't been asked to stay the night with Eri again since that first night.

He can't help but feel overwhelmingly grateful that they hadn't asked him to do it again. He knows he would in a heartbeat if asked again because if he *can* help, he's going to. He thinks... maybe Shota and Hizashi know this as well and maybe don't... tell him *everything*.

Still, he trusts that if the need is there, they'll let him know so he can help. But that hasn't happened, so he's more than okay following these boundaries he, and his guardians, have built up when it comes to Eri.

He was quite proud of the little girl for how far she'd come in such a short time, but he was also incredibly thankful that she wasn't as reliant on him anymore. The stuffed toys really had made all the difference in the world, and he'll forever be indebted to Yaoyorozu's thoughtfulness and creativity.

Not only was Eri letting the stuffed toys fill in some of the blanks between seeing the students, but she was also starting to let Nemuri comfort her and was taking to Togata a bit more than she had been. Togata has a lot more free time on his hands after that battle that had taken so much from them, and he'd been quick to jump headfirst into

helping with Eri.

Izuku adores the little girl, and he's glad that she's chosen him to fill a roll of comfort, he's glad he can be that for her, but he's also overwhelmed sometimes.

He's glad she's dispersing her trust and allowing others to provide something she'd only looked to him for for the first little while. Eri has a whole network of people wanting to help, and he's happy she's opening up and letting them in, as slowly as she's adjusting.

He feels really guilty that he really is *thankful* for the fact— he knows Eri is just seeking comfort in him after a traumatic event— looking to him because they'd bonded in a way that many people wouldn't understand, but in a way the little girl clings to.

Izuku gets the reliance she has on him, he really does.

He gets that he'd unintentionally bonded with the little girl differently than anyone else has.

Right from the start, battling Chisaki, they'd formed a bond in the way they'd used one another's Quirks to take Chisaki down. Izuku knows he wouldn't have been able to without Eri, and he thinks she knows that had he not been using his Quirk to the point of fatal injuries that her Quirk fixed, she would've ended up hurting him accidentally.

They'd managed to balance the scale so perfectly, so trusting in one another, that Izuku would be surprised if there wasn't at least some sort of bond between the two of them.

Then there was the way Eri latched onto the fact that they were similar in a personal setting as well.

Eri was comforted by the fact that Izuku was in the same fostering position she was. Their situations couldn't be further from the same, but that didn't really matter to a little girl just looking to make her situation feel *normal*. They'd both been hurt by the world, in different ways, and they were both safe now with their respective guardians.

He understands it all, but it's still a lot.

It's a lot on top of everything else.

He'd already been busy before meeting Eri, so trying to squeeze her in and making her a priority in his life is more work than he'd care to

admit.

He still sees Eri often, which is something he'd been worried about when he decided he needed to take a bit of a step back from everything. It's a lot easier when things aren't forced— when he doesn't feel obligated to put on a façade and be the superhero Eri was clinging to at first. She really is a great little girl, and the distance he'd put between them had only strengthened their relationship.

She comes around the dorms a lot, since as of now, Shota and Hizashi are the only two adults Nemuri completely trusts to babysit, not to mention the two who Eri has grown comfortable around as well. She had known them first, after all.

They have dinner together at least once a week, sometimes just the five of them, and sometimes Togata, or Hitoshi crash the party too.

Eri is always thrilled when everyone settles in for a meal together.

Sometimes he even sees her in the hallways at school, always surprised, yet thrilled, when the little girl catches him in a hug that only reaches up to his waist, looking up at him with wide adorning eyes. She's always excited to chatter to him briefly about her day before she's ushered along by whoever is watching over her— usually Nemuri, Hizashi, Shota or Togata.

She always gets so excited to see him, especially if it's by chance and they run into each other on campus. It melts his heart every time.

Izuku is beyond glad to see Eri opening up to Togata more, and even gladder when he sees the blonde's expression soften and the adoration shine in his eyes. Izuku knows Togata hadn't completely understood why she'd clung to Izuku like she had, and that he'd even been a little hurt during those first couple days where Eri clung to Izuku like glue since it had been the two Heroes-in-training who'd worked equally to save her.

He hadn't made a big deal of it; had waved him off whenever Izuku would glance helplessly at his upperclassman as the little girl coiled around him like a koala bear. Togata was a kind soul, maybe even too kind, but that didn't mean he wasn't hurting, and longing for Eri to accept him the same as she had Izuku.

It was clear she adored Lemillion but she just hadn't regarded Izuku and Togata in the same way. Izuku had been ''zuku-nii' since those early days in the hospital when Hizashi had kiddingly called him as

such when they thought the little girl was asleep, but Togata was still trying to work her out of the ‘Lemillion’ habit and into a ‘Mirio-kun’ one.

She has been spending more time with Togata now though.

Togata had been the one to step up where Izuku couldn’t. He’s been helping Nemuri out a lot with Eri during the day. He’d taken to studying with Eri in the afternoon when his own class would be working with their Quirks, or doing training, helping the little girl with her online schooling while Nemuri still has classes to teach.

Izuku is glad they’re getting along like they are— Togata needs that distraction, and Eri needs companionship that isn’t an adult, and that can’t be Izuku himself.

Everything had slowly fallen back into place: Izuku’s schedule, classes, training, and even his classmates have all settled back into dorm life following the internships.

It's nice to be back on schedule, even if it’s a tad bit different with Eri around.

Like, he has dinner with his guardians twice a week now, which is a welcome change.

The first night, Saturday, like usual, is just Izuku, Oboro and his guardians (and Hitoshi sometimes too, of course) having a quiet meal upstairs together. The talk about the week, enjoy each other’s company and Izuku gets to see his teachers relax into domesticity. He still really likes Saturday nights.

Tuesday nights however, are when Nermuri, Eri and occasionally Togata and or Hitoshi gather in whichever dorm apartment to have dinner as a group, usually followed by bonding through board games, a movie or some other child friendly activity.

Izuku really appreciates these breaks from the norm— a chance to see his guardians and not his teachers, and to get to know Togata and Nemuri a bit better, and of course to spend time with his favorite little girl. Oboro also seems to really likes these nights, even if he tends to just fall into the shadows, watching fondly and sometimes adding his two cents to try and get Izuku to react.

His schedule is a bit tighter when it comes to free time, which is amazing considering he’d hardly had any before, but now he makes an

effort to be involved with Eri when he can, and he tries to join in class activities as much as possible too. He tries to see Shota, Hizashi and Hitoshi more too, forever grateful for the weekly dinners that make that easier.

It had been far too easy to start to fall back into the isolation he'd grown up in, and it was made worse knowing that this time around there were people who did want him around when he couldn't be there. He doesn't want to let his friends down and hates the thought of prioritizing anyone when he wants to give *everyone* in his life everything he has.

He likes being a part of the class, and getting invited to things and having a whole dorm of people who he considers his friends. He doesn't want to do anything to jeopardize that, so finding time for everything is essential.

It takes some time for everything to fall back into place, but the school year continues on despite the mess of everything falling back into place around them.

Shota springs the school festival on them one class and— well, maybe not *sprung*, since they know it's a thing. It's always talked about, every year; even outside of Yuuei, but with everything else going on around them, Izuku had forgotten it was a thing. Sorta.

Or maybe he just hadn't realized how quickly this year was going by.

They were already at the school festival. Crazy.

It feels like just yesterday he was just starting out at this school, having the worst couple weeks of his life as everything he knew crumbled down around him. Feeling isolated, and alone and *terrified*.

Now look at him— guardians who don't despise him, a class of friends who don't mock or belittle him, a ghost best friend who is probably his closest *anybody* ever, and Kacchan is nice to him again, in... well, a *Kacchan* sort of way. He has a roof over his head, no, *three* roofs over his head technically. He has a pseudo little sister who he absolutely adores and foster aunts and uncles and cousins.

He has All Might and a whole school of Hero teachers he trusts with his life.

Izuku smiles to himself at the thought.

What a difference. He never would've been able to imagine this when he was little. He doesn't even think he could've *dreamed* anything as nice as this. Him, Midoriya Izuku, who'd been written off for being Quirkless at age four, and even *before* that by his mother and father for his odd ability.

He had everything little Izuku craved when he was little, when he realized that everything about him was different— what he dreamed and prayed for.

Izuku wakes up early on the morning of the festival.

He has a plan. He and his class are going to put on the best performance. He's going to make Eri smile— a really, honest, *child-like* smile. He's seen little smiles from the little girl; upward quirks of her lips, adorning little smiles, uncertain half-smiles.

He has to run into town for some rope for their performance. It's not safe to swing Aoyama from a rope that could potentially snap mid performance, and he feels bad asking Yaoyorozu to make some after everything she'd already been making for them so their performance is a success.

Plus, he had wanted to take a trip into town for some other supplies, so it wouldn't be too much extra effort to stop in a hardware store for some sturdy rope.

He knows most of his class is still asleep. It's very early— he's doing some morning practice with Yagi-san and he still needs permission to leave campus.

It's a good thing he knows his guardians will already be up. Hizashi has an early morning patrol, and Izuku knows this because the man had grumbled about not being able to get the entire day off for the festival just days prior.

And Shota, though usually taking any opportunity to sleep in, will be up and ready for the festival too. Izuku thinks most of the teachers are probably up and about by now, and it won't be long until the students start to wake too.

So, Izuku gets dressed in his training clothes and quietly sneaks out of his dorm, heading towards the stairs.

Oboro trails along at his side, hands tucked in his pockets as he keeps pace.

“Do you think they’ll let you leave?” The ghost cocks his head to the side as the continue up. “Going off campus is a lot to ask, especially after everything that’s been going on recently. Shigaraki is unpredictable, and it’s no secret that today is the festival.”

“We can’t put on our performance without the rope,” Izuku frowns, turning the ghost’s words over in his head. He bites down on his lip. “I really hope so. It’s not like I’m asking to go far— I looked online last night and there’s a hardware store just beyond the forest. I can walk.”

“I don’t think they’ll be worried about you walking,” the ghost offers with a teasing smile, “it’s more the you being a *danger magnet* part that I think they’ll focus on. Letting you leave campus alone usually results in some kind of catastrophe.”

“That’s not true,” Izuku pouts, “you’re my friend, y’know you’re supposed to be on my side, right? And *catastrophe* seems like a bit much. Overly dramatic. Maybe I end up in *minor predicaments* sometimes. Maybe.”

“Minor predicaments? No way, ‘zuku. Catastrophe suits you perfectly,” Oboro laughs wholeheartedly, “and friends are also supposed to be *honest*. You’re a danger magnet, dude. Sorry to break this unfortunate news to you. And, if anything, I think I’m being under dramatic; you wind up in a lot of precariously dangerous situations when you’re left alone.”

“Am I ever really alone?” Izuku asks dryly, shooting the ghost an unamused glance, “maybe you’re the danger magnet and it just falls onto me because I’m the only one if can fall onto. You’re always with me, right?”

“Says the one who got kidnapped all on his own. I tried to join you, but nooo—” Oboro huffs out teasingly. “Nice try though.”

Izuku pauses, purses his lips before laughing softly in agreement, “that’s fair.”

Izuku holds the door open for Oboro when they reach the top of the staircase, even if he knows the ghost could phase right through it. Oboro beams widely as he melodramatically waltzes through the door, bowing his head in silent thanks as he passes by.

Izuku watches unamused, deciding then that it’s too early for the ghost’s antics.

Izuku hesitates for just a second as he approaches the door. It still feels weird entering the apartment like this, even if he has a key and explicit permission to come and go as he pleases. He bites his bottom lip as he slips the key he'd been fiddling with in his pocket out and unlocks the door.

The apartment is quiet, but some of the lights are on and the faint smell of something delicious tells him that his guardians are in fact awake, like he'd been hoping.

Izuku kicks off his shoes, not loudly, but not trying to sneak around either.

"Kid?" Izuku here from the kitchen.

"Yeah, it's just me," Izuku identifies himself as to not worry his guardians. He smiles softly to himself as he pushes his shoes up against the wall, exchanging his shoes for his slippers that wait for him. "Good morning."

He steps further into the apartment, shuffling his way into the kitchen with a ghost trailing silently after him. The kitchen is well lit when Izuku finally rounds the corner.

He blinks in surprise when he finds just Shota sitting at the table, hands curled around a mug of steaming coffee. He glances back behind him, listening for any noises of the other man around, but the apartment is silent besides the kitchen.

"Morning," the man bows his head gruffly, sipping at his coffee, "you just missed Hizashi, so I hope it's me you're looking for. Something wrong?"

"Why is your first thought always that there's something wrong?" Izuku frowns, inching into the room and settling at the table. His guardian shifts a bit from where he'd been slouched in exhaustion, straightening up enough to give Izuku his attention.

Shota gives him a tired, bland glance before sipping at his coffee again, "force of habit."

Izuku pursues his lips in halfhearted offense as the ghost hovering behind him snickers.

"And," the man continues thoughtfully, "you're not usually one to come up and see us first thing in the morning. It's a safe assumption

when it comes to the hoard of you hellions I'm responsible for. Something to do with the festival then?"

"Man," Oboro chimes in, sounding impressed, "he can read you like a book."

"Sorta," Izuku hums out.

"If it's got to do with stage fright, I'm afraid Hizashi is far more suited for that kind of peptalk than I am." Shota hesitates, looks down into his mug before continuing softly, "just... try your best. You've all been practicing hard, and you'll do fine."

"Thank you," Izuku's heart warms fondly, "but that's not what I wanted to talk to you about."

Shota cocks his head in Izuku's direction, urging him on silently.

"Um..." Izuku laces his fingers together, settling them on the tabletop anxiously, "well, I just... I was wondering if I could have permission to head to town this morning before the festival starts?"

"Why?" Shota arches an eyebrow but doesn't instantly deny.

They'd been uptight about security since the kidnapping and dorms instatement, so Izuku's not surprised. Getting leave to go home on weekends is a hassle too, as far as Izuku's heard. He personally doesn't know, but Uraraka, Hitoshi, Iida and Asui, as well as various other classmates, have complained about it.

"The rope Aoyama and I have been using is starting to fray," Izuku explains, "I don't feel comfortable using it if there's a chance it could break. I don't want him to get hurt, and it's not safe to dangle him over an audience if there's even a chance of it snapping. I would ask Yaoyorozu to make one but... she went to sleep early last night, and I don't want to disturb her this morning since she's been using her Quirk a lot already and it's super easy to get rope. Plus, I wanted to grab a couple other things too. I promise I'll be back way before the festival!"

"Aren't you supposed to be meeting Yagi this morning?"

"Uh, yeah," Izuku admits, "but I'll have loads of time to finish that and then grab what I need in town and get back to school before the festival starts. I'm a fast walker."

“And you want to go alone?” Shota asks carefully.

“Well,” Izuku huffs, ignoring the silent presence leaning against the backrest of Izuku’s chair, “yes? Figured I could get it out of the way so we’re ready for the performance. Aoyama’s navel laser is a vital part of the performance— it wouldn’t be the same without it.”

“Hizashi or I could take you,” Shota offers.

“No, no,” Izuku denies quickly, “it’s only a short walk. I’ll be fine. And you’ll both be busy anyways. Hizashi is already on patrol, right? He’ll just be back in time to announce the festival, and I know you told Nemuri that you’d look after Eri-chan with Togata today. She’s been really excited for the festival. And I know you’re supposed to be keeping an eye on us too. I’ll manage alone. I’ll be fine.”

The man hesitates, like he’s seriously trying to find the time in his schedule to tag along with Izuku but comes up short if the sour grimace on his face is anything to go off. The expression melts off his face, almost as fast as it appeared, and he blows out a defeated breath, “fine.”

“Thank you,” Izuku bows his head. “I’ll be super fast.”

“Uh huh,” the man sighs, sipping at his coffee. “Just don’t make me regret this, Kid. Stay out of trouble. You have my number— if anything happens, contact me, alright? After everything that’s happened recently, Nezu’s being super uptight about this festival, and he’ll be on my ass about this. I think it’s justifiable at this point.”

“I know,” Izuku bows his head, “I won’t get into any trouble. I know how excited everyone is for this, and Eri’s been talking about it nonstop! I really hope she likes it.”

“She will,” Shota assures knowingly, “I’m sure Eri would like anything you're a part of.”

“I want her to like it because she likes it,” Izuku pouts, shifting in his seat so he can cross his arms along the edge of the table, “not because I’m a part of it.”

“I know,” Shota smiles lightly, lifting his mug to his lips as he continues, “and she will. You’re just an added bonus. With all the effort you kids are putting in, I’m sure everyone will love it. Just don’t tell your classmates I said that; it’ll probably psych them out.”

Izuku believes that to be true.

Shota isn't one for praise like that, and he knows quite a few of his classmates wouldn't even believe him if he did tell them *Aizawa-Sensei* commended their efforts and said everyone would love their festival performance. Shota doesn't bother feeding their egos, so when he does take the time to compliment them, it means something.

"Anyways, have you eaten yet?" Shota asks without looking over, "I know you're on your way to see Yagi, and if you're going to run errands after that, you won't have much time to eat before your classmates will want you to practice again before the actual performance. You know I'm not a fan of you not eating, especially with that Quirk of yours."

"Oh, um, no. Not-not yet, at least."

Izuku had been planning on grabbing something quick downstairs. He'd need to meet Yagi-san soon if he wanted to get any practice in. The shops in town start opening at seven thirty, and he wants to get that out of the way so he can help with everything else.

"Did you want the rest of this?" Izuku glances down at the plate Shota gestures too, eyeing the omurice with only a couple bites taken out of it. "Hizashi decided we needed a big breakfast for such a special day. He's always like this on special occasions. I'm never hungry this early, but I didn't have the heart to remind him of that when he was so excited."

"Appease the husband," Oboro whispers approvingly. "Well trained."

Izuku bites back a laugh.

"Sure," he agrees after forcing down the laughter, "I like Hizashi's cooking, and I haven't had omurice in ages! Auntie used to make it all the time, but it was usually really spicy. A lot of the food in the Bakugou house is spicy."

"And he likes to cook for you," Shota tells him fondly as he slides the plate across the table. "This one isn't spicy, but do you like spicy?"

"I'll eat anything," Izuku informs as he takes a bite. He hadn't bothered grabbing his own pair of chopsticks, just uses the ones already on the plate. The omurice is delicious, just as everything else Hizashi had made since Izuku started staying with them tends to be. "I'm really not picky at all. I didn't like spicy at first, when I was little,

but I spent so much time at Kacchan's house that I grew tolerant to it, and then I started to like it."

"I see," the man nods, finishing off his coffee. "Just remember you're allowed to have opinions and preferences. If you don't like something, or if it's too spicy, or whatever, let us know, alright? Now, I've got to head down to the main gates, and then go meet up with Nem and Eri. You good to lock up when you're finished?"

The main gates? Why would Shota need to head to the gate?

Izuku shakes himself from the thought, offering a half smile to his guardian. It's not his business anyways. Shota had already stood up and put his mug in the sink. He tucks his hands into his pockets and regards Izuku carefully.

"Of course, and... I've liked everything, don't worry about me," Izuku assures with a smile as he scoops up another bite of his breakfast, "Hizashi is a good cook. But... alright. I'll keep that in mind."

Izuku really doubts Hizashi could make anything he wouldn't like since his palate really is expanse and he'd grown up taking whatever was offered without complaint. Any food is good food, and if he can stomach Kacchan's spicy food, he's sure there's nothing he can't.

"Appease the *father*," Oboro whispers under his breath. "Well trained."

Izuku promptly chokes on his bite of omurice.

Izuku really should know by now that whenever he thinks something is going to be easy, it just isn't going to be easy.

Training had gone on without a hitch, as usual. He works with the Quirk, and All Might offers advice when it's appropriate. They don't get to practice like this all the time, but Izuku really enjoys it.

They're interrupted by Hatsume Mei, who is excited to unveil the gloves Izuku had been talking with her about. After she'd put in the work to make his new Hero costume, after the Stain incident where he'd almost died, she'd been the one he turns to when he wants to run support gear by anyone.

She's always super ecstatic to bring Izuku's ideas to life.

The gloves are perfect, just like his modified Hero costume. They're

compact and they fit his hands just right. They feel *right* when he flexes his hands and mimics how he'd been learning how to best position himself to achieve the best results with his ranged attacks.

He just knows, even without trying them yet, that he'll be able to harness his ranged attacks better with the gear. He needs all the help he can get, and anything that comes from Hatsume is bound to be amazing.

Hatsume departs after handing over an instruction manual.

He works with the gloves after that.

He and Yagi-san are both impressed by the support gear, and Izuku feels giddy as he learns by trial. Using the compressed air pressure is so much easier with the gloves than it had been when Izuku was doing it free handed. It'll be easy to get used to the gear, but he knows he needs a lot of practice.

He can't wait to show Shota and Hizashi later.

Oboro watches in awe as Izuku learns the new gloves, making progress in leaps and bounds.

It's the ghost who warns him that he's running behind. He leaves All Might with nothing more than an apology called over his shoulder as he heads towards town.

It's almost eight by the time Izuku makes it through the forest surrounding campus and rushes to get everything he needs. He finds the sturdiest lightweight rope the hardware store offers and pays for it in a rush.

He knows his class is bound to be up by now, and he's sure they're getting ready to practice. It's a good thing he's just a dancer, and part of the stage crew. He and Aoyama do their own thing mostly, and he's about as good on his feet as he's going to get at this point. It won't matter if he misses a couple rehearsals, right?

He really isn't expecting to run into a criminal.

Not a villain, not really, but a *criminal*.

Izuku remembers stumbling upon the man's videos on social media just the night before.

Gentle Criminal, and his camera woman La Brava.

He'd never caused harm to anyone, as far as Izuku knows, so... Izuku isn't entirely sure what he's supposed to do in a situation like this, but when he realizes what the man is planning, no doubt something to do with the school if he's not-so-coincidentally so close to it, he knows he can't do nothing.

There are too many people looking forward to the festival.

Eri is looking forward to the festival.

If anything were to happen, as harmless as he's sure Gentle would be on school grounds, he knows the festivities will be called off for safety reasons if they were infiltrated.

He pleads, at first— Gentle hasn't done anything wrong yet, even if he's planning to. Izuku hopes and prays that he'll be able to convince the man to reconsider, but when he doesn't... well, Izuku isn't about to let them ruin his shot as bringing Eri joy for the first time in who knows how long.

He doesn't really have a second to consider *time* as he fights Gentle.

He knows he's fighting hard—and Gentle is putting in his all too. They both have goals they're willing to fight for. He's a strong opponent, and even more so when La Brava used her Quirk on him.

Izuku really doesn't know how he manages to win. He really should get Hatsume a thank you gift of some sort since he's sure he probably wouldn't have managed to stop the man without his new support gear.

The fight... takes a lot more out of him than he lets on.

This... this fight really gave him a lot to think about. He doesn't think Gentle is really a villain, not in the real sense. Certainly not like Shigaraki and the League. He does bad things to prove a point, but... he's not bad.

They're similar. Izuku and Gentle.

He can't focus on that though; he needs to focus on the performance that's due to be starting soon. He doesn't have his stuff, or the rope. He's not ready either! This had taken so much longer than he'd thought, and he silently apologizes to Shota as he runs with an Ectoplasm clone. He aches, and he's sure his movements will be stiff,

but he'll still give it his all in an attempt to make Eri smile.

That's what's important right now.

Izuku is just making it back to the festival area when Oboro finally lets out a breath. The ghost puckers his lips, turning to Izuku accusingly, a finger pointed towards the green-haired boy's chest.

"You're trouble," the ghost whines, "*I'm* stressed out; if I was alive, I probably would've just *died* of a heart attack watching that! You no longer get to question why people call you a danger magnet, you *danger magnet*! It was supposed to be an easy, harmless errand run!"

The ghost had been around the whole time, watching and worrying, and offering to help when Izuku rebounded off of Gentle's Quirk, or when he took a particularly hard hit.

Oboro had been going stir-crazy, sticking close to Izuku, but never close enough to touch. He'd even settled at Izuku's side, just out of reach, towards the end of the fight, and Izuku knows he'd probably looked like a crazy person shaking his head so adamantly so many times during the fight as the ghost pleaded to assist.

He can't learn to rely on a Quirk that's not his.

Sure, he can use Cloud, with Oboro's help and his own ability, but Cloud *isn't* his. Cloud isn't something he can conjure whenever he needs it. It isn't like One for All.

He'd learned that the hard way when he'd be separated from Oboro during the kidnapping.

Cloud belonged to someone else, so developing a dependability on it isn't smart.

And, the last thing they needed was Oboro's Quirk being spotted again, especially with so many Heroes, students and teachers just on the other side of the forest. They'd narrowly avoided Gentle and La Brava ruining the day— if an unknown Quirk was spotted it would probably be deemed a threat just the same.

It's when Izuku is finally, finally changing into his suit for the performance, the minutes ticking down, that he takes a second to glance at his phone.

His heart stops when he sees the text notifications.

Shota 8:26AM

You should be on your way back now.

Text me when youre back on campus.

Shota 8:33AM

Training with Yagi shouldve finished by now.

You should be back on campus.

Text me when you see this.

The next texts come a while later— quite recently. Izuku's heart hammers in his chest as he forces himself to scroll down, shame and embarrassment lifting to his cheeks.

He really does feel awful.

He feels even worse that he'd not seen these texts until now. He could've responded if he knew they existed. He would've— right after the fight. As soon as human possible, honestly, because he *hates* letting his guardians down.

Shota 8:53AM

I do love hearing about supposed trouble involving my kids through the teacher grapevine when I specifically told them to contact me if they ran into any problems. That was my condition to permit your outing.

Shota 9:41AM

Yagi confirmed you're back on school grounds. You were supposed to back hours ago. Ive been hearing all sorts of stuff from the teachers but nothing from you.

I'm waiting for confirmation from you Izuku. Snipe said there was a villain.

Are you okay?

Izuku 9:52 AM

Yes! Sorry! I'm here. Just a hiccup on the way back to school. I'm fine!

Safe and sound. Getting ready now!

The response comes almost as fast as Izuku had sent his own.

Shota must've been holding onto his phone waiting, which has a new wave of guilt settling in his stomach. He hates this.

Shota 9:52 AM

Oh good, our texts are going through.

Izuku can almost hear the sarcasm in that text. He feels bad, biting his lip as he tries to figure out a response. He doesn't think anything he can text right now will convey his heavy guilt right, and maybe... it's best to let Shota calm down before he tries to grovel and apologize.

Probably better done in person anyways.

His patience is answered by the next vibration of his phone.

Shota 9:53AM

Your classmates are waiting for you.

Focus on your performance now, we'll talk later. Good luck.

Izuku swallows down the guilt which is swiftly replaced with nerves and anxiety. He doesn't doubt Shota will be talking to the other teacher— probably Hound Dog and Ectoplasm who were the two to find him and the villains.

Oh no, he's in so much trouble...

"This is not lookin' good for you," the ghost who'd been reading over his shoulder lets out a low whistle. "He's probably been super worried all morning."

"I'm dead," Izuku whispers, dropping his head between his knees. "How am I supposed to text someone in the middle of a fight? I couldn't not stop him. I feel so bad though; I didn't mean for him to worry... It all just happened so fast!"

"Some would argue you should've told the adults right away, probably as soon as you saw Gentle," the ghost plops down beside him, patting Izuku's back sympathetically. "It is kinda their job? Probably would've been a faster fight with Ectoplasm, or Hound Dog, or even Eraserhead helping."

“The festival would’ve been cancelled if I’d done that,” Izuku mutters. “You heard Shota— principal Nezu was already on edge. Anything out of the ordinary would’ve shut everything down. You know even Gentle would be a threat at this point. I… I don’t regret what I did. I’ll happily take the loss and punishment if it means Eri and everyone else gets to enjoy the festival. They were so excited.”

“So tell Sho that,” Oboro chides, nose scrunch up in a ‘duh’ sort of way. “I mean, it probably won’t get you out of trouble entirely— you *were* reckless today and you did disobey him, technically, but he *knows* you. He knows the type of person you are. That you’re a self-sacrificing blockhead, a naïve kid with a heart of gold, an idiot who thinks about others more than himself—”

“Do your peptalks always include so many insults?”

“The best ones always do, Sport.”

“Don’t call me that,” Izuku groans, finally lifting his head from between his legs. “I hope you’re right because I don’t like him being angry with me.”

“He’s more worried,” Oboro assures offhandedly, in that way he does when they’re talking about Shota and Hizashi, who he’s known for *years*, “I’ll bet he’s relieved now too. You’re totally in trouble, don’t get me wrong, but he’s more worried than angry, especially if the other teachers told him how you looked after that fight. You looked like you’d been hit by a truck.”

“It was an elastic force field, thank you very much.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Oboro rolls his eyes, “whatever helps you sleep at night. Now, get yourself ready. It’s almost time for your class’ performance. Who would’ve thought *I’d* be the responsible time management one. Y’know, I was almost late to so many classes in school, this is a step up for me.”

“I’ve apparently hit a new low,” Izuku sighs teasingly as he finally tugs on his jacket. He frowns down at his phone before slipping that into his pocket, “anyways, the show must go on. My impending doom will have to be put on hold for now.”

“That’s the spirit!” Oboro chimes, rushing forwards to open the door for Izuku, “now, speaking of your performance, how do you feel about a bit of… *fog* during the end, huh? Perfectly timed, just a teeny tiny amount to add a bit of oomph, you know?”

“If you touch me during this performance, I will reconsider your entire existence.” Izuku arches a challenging eyebrow as he passes by the ghost, knowing he’s right behind him by the chill that follows, “I refused to believe my mom didn’t want me for years, so I can refuse to believe in annoying ghosts who ignore boundaries.”

“Alllright, *duly noted*,” the ghost huffs out. Oboro pauses, glancing at Izuku and frowning as they head towards the festival, “and *really* depressing.”

Their performance, thankfully, goes a lot better than his morning errands had.

He arrives just at the nick of time, classmates ushering him backstage and checking his costume. Everything pans out exactly as it should, exactly as they’d practiced. His dancing is a bit stiff, a little exhausted after his quick visit to Recovery Girl and the morning’s events finally starting to weigh in on him, but he managed through.

It takes a little more effort psyching himself up to holding Aoyama’s entire weight with nothing more than a rope and running him along the overhead ice platforms so Aoyama’s Quirk mimics an actual disco ball with all the dropping ice flecks.

Everything turns out perfect.

Izuku has never been prouder— especially when he looks out into the audience and sees Eri positively *beaming*. He bites back his own grin as he hoists Aoyama up a little more, shifting his grip carefully. He spots Shota and Hizashi too, leaning against the wall by the door watching — the blond is grinning, while even Shota sports a little pleased smile as he watches.

Oboro is down with Shota and Hizashi, grinning that wide squinty-eyed grin. He gives a double thumbs up when he notices Izuku eyes, grin widening, if that’s even possible for such a happy smile.

Togata has Eri hoisted up in one arm, and in the other is an awestruck Kota.

Kota was here?

Since when?

That must’ve been why Shota was going to the main gates that

morning.

The flurry of fondness in his chest makes everything he'd gone through that morning feel worth it. The festival is supposed to be fun — it's supposed to make people smile, and let people have a good time. Everything is worth it when he sees those two traumatized little kids staring up in awe and smiling.

Putting on the show is a lot more fun than Izuku assumed it was going to be. He likes making people happy— making them *smile*. The crowd loves their performance, and they'd all done it together; from the band, to the dancers, to the stage crew.

They wrap things up quickly after that. The crowd floods out the doors, and Izuku and his classmates are left to tidy up their mess. They're all still hyped up with the fading adrenaline from performing, so Izuku knows it won't take long to clean it all up.

Izuku almost forgets he's even in trouble until he sees Shota staring at him from the doorway. He freezes up, swallowing nervously when the man wordlessly gestures him over.

"*That* can't be good," Izuku startles at the voice so close, swirling around to see Hitoshi with his arms full of ice chunks. Hitoshi nods in Shota's direction, as an indication of what he means, "does this have anything to do with you arriving the *minute* we were supposed to go on stage?"

"I, um," Izuku swallows, "I'm sorta in some trouble," he admits it quietly to his friend, marching over to the waste bin where he drops his arm full of confetti. Hitoshi follows him along, frowning thoughtfully.

"I'll say," the purple-haired boy snorts, "you really annoyed the 1-A kids by showing up so late, I wouldn't keep him waiting too if I were you. And if you skip out on the entire clean up, *I'll* be pissed."

"I'd rather clean up than be chewed out," Izuku huffs, deciding to bite the bullet and head towards his guardian. "Wish me luck..."

"Good luck!" Oboro chimes from above, sitting right above the two of them on the ice platform Todoroki had made. Oboro is far too amused by the ice above considering he can float. If he really wanted to hang out by the ceiling, he could. Anytime.

Hitoshi doesn't speak, but he does give him an almost mocking salute.

Izuku sheepishly heads towards Shota, glad everyone else seems to busy cleaning up to notice him going. He doesn't think he'd be able to handle any teasing right now.

When he reaches his guardian, Shota says nothing. He simply turns and leaves out the door, expectant that Izuku will follow. And he does. It would be stupid to disobey now.

Shota remains quiet for a couple steps, and Izuku follows suit, keeping pace.

It's not until they're a safe distance away that Shota finally speaks

"You know, I don't know if it makes it better or worse knowing you ignored All Might too," Shota hums out as the head away from the doors for a bit more privacy. "I had to talk down All Might, Ectoplasm and a very angry Hound Dog just now. You're lucky you're getting this scolding from me instead of Hound Dog. He's so upset he's almost forgotten human language. Listen, what you did today wasn't okay."

"Sorry," Izuku bows his head, chewing on his bottom lip shamefully.

He'd ignored All Might too?

He hadn't even realized. He'd honestly been too worried about Shota's texts to read his notifications any further than Shota. He owes All Might an apology too.

"So, you wanna tell me what happened, or should I tell you what I know?"

"I didn't mean for it to happen," Izuku whispers out, tugging at his thumb anxiously, "and I really would've called you—! Just... just I sorta *forgot*, and then I was fighting, and he was strong and I-I knew if he won, then the festival would get cancelled and I... I really didn't want that to happen... I'm so sorry..."

Izuku bows his head even further down, teeth digging into his bottom lip to the point he tastes blood.

"I know you're sorry," Shota studies him thoughtfully, "I just don't understand your aversion to receiving help. Why do you feel the need to take everything on alone? We had Pros patrolling the area for a reason. You think we didn't foresee the possibility that someone might try something during a school event? You shouldn't have confronted them– you should've left to a safe location as soon as you realized and

contacted someone. Contacted me."

"But the festival..." Izuku whispers.

"Gentle Criminal is mostly harmless," Shota tells him gruffly, arms crossing over his chest. His jaw is set in annoyance, and Izuku hates knowing it's because of him. "As Pro Heroes, we're fully capable of gaging how dangerous any specific villain or situation is. That's not your job yet. And, from what I heard, you and the villains didn't even make it onto school property until just before Ectoplasm and Hound Dog found you. We could've had this dealt with before they even stepped foot on campus. There would've been no reason to even think about canceling the festival."

Izuku wilts as that sinks in. Would it really have been that easy? Had he messed up big time?

"I just wanted Eri to have a good time."

"I know," Shota sighs, tension easy from his jaw as he slouches tiredly. He lifts a hand to card his fingers through his hair. "I know you did. But you can't let something like that hinder your thoughts when it comes to being a Hero. There is simply nothing more important than safety. Your first priority is your own life, but your second? That's to keep people safe.

"You knew there was a chance the festival would be canceled, that there was a chance that Gentle Criminal was *dangerous*. There was no guarantee that you could've stopped him— you're just a student, Izuku, you're a *kid*. You made the decision to jeopardize the safety of the school so the festival could continue. That's why the teachers are angry."

Izuku opens his mouth to speak, but Shota shakes his head, and it instantly quiets anything he was about to say, "I know why you tried, and it was noble— Eri is lucky to have a brother like you— but it wasn't the right call here, Kid. You still have a lot to learn, so knock off trying to do everything *alone*. You'll just keep getting yourself into trouble, or worse, getting yourself *hurt*."

Izuku looks back towards the ground, that shame settling in his chest once again. "I'm sorry."

Shota shakes his head, unaccepting of the apology. "Let us help you. Let us *teach* you. That's what we're here to do. Rushing into things without help is how Heroes wind up dead. We all have networks we

rely on in this line of work. Underground ones, limelight ones. Police networks. And you? *You* have an entire network of teachers who can and will help you if you *let* us."

Shameful tears well in his eyes, and the guilt twists in his stomach making him feel unwell. He lifts his hands to palm furiously at his face, sniffling to himself, "I just wanted to see her *smile*. I didn't mean to cause any problems or worry you. I thought I could handle it, and that everything would be *alright*."

"I know you meant well," Shota sighs heavily, sounding tired and overwhelmed, "and everything did turn out alright, besides you needing an impromptu visit to Recovery Girl and you almost letting your entire class down, of course. Heroics isn't a one-man show, Izuku. Learn from your mistakes, alright? Nothing bad happened this time, count yourself lucky."

Izuku nods pathetically, palming at his watery eyes.

"Now," Shota wraps Izuku in a one-armed hug. He uses the other hand to drag gently down Izuku's cheeks, wiping away the tear tracks, "wipe away the tears, put on a smile and enjoy the rest of the festival. It'll be a whole year until the next one. We'll talk about you ignoring your phone and your punishment later. I know there're two little kids who're dying to see you."

"S-sorry about not replying," Izuku winces, leaning into Shota's half hug before pulling away, "I think I left it on silent by accident. I didn't even realize. I would've responded! Honest!"

"Well, just don't do it again. Unless there is a reason for it to be off, I want it on," Shota huffs, shaking his head. "I was really worried when you didn't answer, and no one had heard from you. Not just as your teacher, but as your guardian. I was already hesitant about letting you go this morning and then you don't respond to any of my texts or calls."

"I know. I'm—"

"Don't say you're sorry, because I already know that," Shota throws an arm over Izuku's shoulders, leading them back to where Kacchan is yelling about something. "Sorry isn't a fix-all. Learning from your mistakes and improving is. I was just saying. I want to be able to reach you if I need to, and if you don't look at your phone, it's pretty pointless, yeah?"

“Yeah.” Izuku physically stops himself from apologizing again. “I’ll do better, I promise.”

Shota glances down, offering him a tiny, almost not-even-there smile as his arm tugs Izuku closer faintly, “I know that too.”

Being reunited with the kids is perhaps Izuku favorite part of the day — well, that, and seeing Eri really smile for the first time. He hopes he never forgets that first stunning smile from the little girl, or the wide, sparkling awe in Kota’s eyes as he watched, a bit overwhelmed, as some of the 1-A students showcased their Quirks in the best ways.

They both deserve the world, and he’s so happy was able to offer them something like this.

Eri rambles off excitedly about her favorite parts of the performance, and Kota chimes in too, smiling just as wide and enthusiastically. He’s glad to see Eri and Kota as fast friends. He’d been a bit worried about Eri only spending time with high schoolers and adults.

And he’d been worried about Kota too, for only being around the Pussycats, as amazing as they are.

They clean up the rest of their mess and continue on to all the other events the classes are putting on throughout the afternoon. Togata and Izuku look after the kids, and Shota disappears after everything is all cleaned up, probably to do more damage control with the teachers, and to explain everything to Hizashi if he hasn’t already. Oboro sticks close, and Hitoshi tags along too.

They’ll have Kota with them until later this evening, when the Pussycats arrive to bring him home.

Shota had told Izuku that they had a meeting with the Commission regarding Ragdoll, and no one wanted the little boy around for it. It was a good call, and lined up perfectly with the Culture festival, so Shota had agreed to look after him as well.

Towards the end of the day is the first time they really get a second of quiet.

“It was so, so cool!” Kota grins, bounding along at Izuku’s side. The little boy clutches at Izuku’s right hand, and Eri holds his left just as tight. Togata is holding Eri’s other hand and Hitoshi, who decided to stick around still, walks by Kota. “You’re so cool, Deku! You held that

twinkly boy up forever! I saw you!"

"'zuku-nii is the coolest!" Eri agrees cheerfully, grinning up at Izuku as she skips between him and Togata. "It was so fun! I liked the dancing! It made me feel happy, I think!"

"Hey, brat," Hitoshi scoffs playfully, "what about me? I was dancing with 'zuku-nii too. I got up on a stage for you, Eri-chan. You know, I was surrounded by the girls. Do you know how awkward some of those dance rehearsals were?"

"Only cause you're painfully shy around girls," Oboro teases good-naturedly, and Izuku is glad only he can hear it. He doesn't think Hitoshi could handle any teasing after already being suckered into getting up on stage with everyone.

He's still hesitant about the 1-A students, and Izuku knows he doesn't consider himself one of them yet, but hopefully this culture festival performance will help him settle in. He really is a part of the class—everyone is happy to have him there.

"'toshi-kun is so cool too!" Eri backtracks, looking up him with wide eyes.

"You're so right, Eri-chan! They both did amazing up there, huh?" Togata agrees with the exact same enthusiasm. He smiles down at her fondly, nodding his head. "All the 1-A students did a great job! They all practiced really hard, yeah? Dancing can be hard, and so can playing music! And, you wouldn't believe how hard running an entire performance is!"

"Deku did both," Kota grins sharply, "he danced and helped make all the cool Quirks happen! The lights!"

"They were so pretty!" Eri gasps in excitement, "sparkly and shiny, and cool! I liked the dance most though!" Eri tells everyone, pulling her hands away from both Izuku and Togata, "I wanna do it too! I wanna dance like 'zuku-nii and 'toshi-kun!"

"Me too!" Kota tugs free of Izuku's other hand, moving to stand with Eri.

The three teenagers (and ghost) pause to watch the little kids squirm and wiggle and almost dance. They're doing some of the moves... sorta. Eri has a fairly good step sequence going, and Kota really likes the ground punch which he does on repeat, looking more like a frog

than anything else.

“They’re adorable,” Oboro coos from Izuku’s side. “Well? Show them the moves! Get ‘toshi out on the dance floor with you! C’mon, I know the two of you could do this with your eyes closed! Ashido is a tough coach. Well? C’mon! Entertain the children! Look at those smiles!”

“Do you want us to show you how?” Izuku finds himself asking, crouching down so he’s on their level. The two kids perk up, rushing towards him. He wobbles as Kota uses his knee as support, and Eri grabs his hand like she wants to tug him up.

“Yes!” Kota chirps out.

“Will you? Please!” Eri adds, clutching at his hand and staring up with quite possibly the cutest puppy-eyes he’s ever seen. He wants to both curse whoever taught her this, and also thank them excessively at the same time. “We wanna learn ‘zuku-nii and ‘toshi-kun’s dance!”

“Show us!” Kota runs over to Hitoshi, grabbing his hand and tugging him closer to where Eri is still clutching at Izuku, despite the hesitance on the purple-haired boy’s face. “Pleaseee?”

“I wouldn’t mind learning those super cool moves either,” Togata smiles kindly, tag teaming with the little kids. “So? Do you think you guys can teach us? I kinda have two left feet, so it might be a bit of work.”

“Well, Hitoshi?” Izuku cocks an eyebrow, knowing the other teen, like just about everyone else, is weak to Eri’s charm. And not only that, but who can say no to Kota acting like a regular little boy and shooting them wide puppy-eyes too.

“Uh, alright...” Hitoshi accepts defeat, willingly following Kota the rest of the way, “but we won’t be as good at teaching as Ashido is. We’re rookies compared to her. She taught us everything, y’know, Izuku and I were not very good dancers at first.”

“Woo to guilt tripping and peer pressuring our grumpy-cat friends!” Oboro laughs. “Hitoshi is a sucker for kids— it runs on the maternal side of the family, definitely! Kids and cats: the way into an Aizawa’s heart.”

Izuku shoots the ghost a quick glance, unsure if he should be offended for Hitoshi, Yua and Shota’s sake but decides he can’t argue that in the end. He’d seen them all worship cats, and he’s quite sure no one is

immune to Eri's bright, inquisitive eyes. Hitoshi and Shota both soften around kids too.

"It's all just for fun anyways," Togata reminds kindly, setting a hand on each of the children's heads and giving a playful shake that. "We're all rookies too, right guys?"

The kids cheer loudly in response. It's music to Izuku's ears. Seeing them both being *kids* again. Learning how to be childish and have fun without *thinking*. It's all he wants for them.

Kota drags Hitoshi over by the hand, and Eri grabs each Izuku and Togata's hands, tugging them along too. Oboro trails after them with a wide grin. The kids lead everyone to a patch of grass that they determine is best to dance on. Izuku doesn't see the difference, but Kota is very adamant that it's perfect, and Eri agrees with a seriousness that he can't deny.

And they dance.

Sorta.

It's messy and uncoordinated, awkward with no music and they truthfully don't really do the dance at all, but Kota is grumpily trying not laugh as Togata does the goofiest looking dance moves with the sole purpose of entertaining.

Hitoshi is on the ground, where he'd refused to move after dramatically (completely on purpose) falling to get out of dancing, accepting, overly dramatically as he squirms in the grass like getting up is a hardship, defeat, much to the kids' glee. He's sitting cross legged now, laughing openly at their upperclassman, and settled surprisingly close to Oboro.

Izuku himself twirls Eri around, who is in awe as her dress catches air and fans out around her. She begs him to spin her again and again and again until she's dizzy and giggling as she wobbles, catching his waist in a hug to steady herself.

They should really think about getting her a princess dress.

Oboro watches with a calm smile, leaning back on his arms and grinning widely whenever Izuku looks over at him. He laughs joyfully at Togata, and teases Hitoshi, even if his words are only heard by one.

It's messy and uncoordinated—

But...

It might actually be his new favorite part of the day.

Hitoshi and Izuku are the ones who bring Eri and Kota up to the 1-A apartment when the little ones are all danced out. Izuku has Kota on his back, and Hitoshi has Eri. They're not asleep, but they are very close as Togata waves them all goodnight at the 1-A Height Alliance steps and departs to his own dorm.

Shota is upstairs when they get there, surveying over everyone briefly before ushering everyone into the apartment. The teens carefully settle the kids down on the couch, and Hitoshi plops down between them. Kota shifts away from the purple-haired teen like he's suddenly offensive, while Eri giggles tiredly.

Hitoshi takes both in stride, glancing between the two kids before blinking up at Izuku. "I'm beat," he says tiredly. "Will you grab me a water, 'zuku?"

"Yeah," Izuku nods, pushing himself up from the loveseat he'd flopped into after setting Kota down. "Would you like some water, Eri? Kota?"

Both kids accept the offer, so Izuku heads into the kitchen to fetch everyone a drink.

They had done a lot of dancing after all. Exhausting work.

Shota is sat at the table when he gets in there, laptop open in front of him as he types out what looks to be an email. Izuku doesn't linger long, not wanting to intrude on his privacy, or see anything confidential or something.

"Hey," Izuku greets, which earns a hum of reply. Izuku doesn't take the lack of response to heart, simply continues with his task, beelining to the fridge and grabbing four water bottles. He pauses there, glancing back at Shota, "where's Hizashi?"

"Campus patrol," Shota waves off, looking up from his laptop briefly, "he drew the short straw when the festival ended, so he's on straggler duty with Nemuri. They might be Heroes in training, but teenagers are still teenagers."

Izuku's mouth forms an 'o' shape as he nods. "That makes sense."

“So?” Shota asks as Izuku shuts the fridge, “how was the rest of your festival? I hope you had some fun, even after everything.”

“It was fun,” Izuku admits with a soft smile. “Eri and Kota are really great kids, and Togata-senpai is a lot of fun. I never even thought about introducing Eri and Kota, but I think they both needed someone their age, you know? I just...they, uh, seemed like... well,” Izuku bites his bottom lip, “opposites? I didn't think they'd really get along.”

“They are,” Shota snorts out, “you should’ve seen them when they met. I’d never seen Eri so annoyed, and Kota was grumpy from the second we introduced them. For a while this morning, I feared I was going to have to keep them separated all day.”

“Really?” Izuku blinks in surprise. That seems fairly in character for Kota, but not for Eri. “Why?”

“They both started off a bit...” Shota bites his lip, almost amused, “*protective* of you. Or maybe protective of their standing in your life is more accurate. We already knew Kota highly regards you after the summer camp where you saved him, and Eri... well, she is still a bit dependent on you too. Thankfully they found common ground.”

“Common ground?” Izuku quirks an eyebrow, still trying to wrap his head around the fact those two kids disliked each other instantly over *him*. “What common ground?”

“You again,” the man tells him, quirking his head to the side as he watches Izuku’s expressions. “When they finally did start talking, they talked about you. Turns out they both think you’re pretty cool, Kid. They were fast friends after that. Bonded over you— talked about you at first, and then shared excitement about seeing you perform and just seeing you in general. It was cute.”

“Really?” Izuku bites back the smile, “I never even thought— I mean, I know they both like me, of course... but... they really like me that much?”

“You do make quite the impression on people,” Shota’s eyes are back on his computer, but his lips do curls upwards faintly, almost fondly.

Shota is quiet for a second as Izuku shuffles the water bottles around in his arms.

“You know, they kept talking about your friend,” Shota tells him after a second, just as Izuku is about to head back to hand out the water.

“Eri mentioned your friend, and I assumed she meant Hitoshi at first, but then, strangely enough, Kota seemed to know what she was talking about too. He’d never met Hitoshi before this afternoon.”

“R-really?” Izuku bites hard at the inside of his cheek, “must’ve been one of my classmates then. I really don’t know what they were talking about... I have no idea who they could’ve been...”

Izuku swallows and hopes Shota can’t tell. He hopes he doesn’t look guilty, or suspicious when Shota looks up again, staring at Izuku. It feels like the man is looking right into his soul and searching for something.

Izuku can't help but shift anxiously as his guardian observes him from his pace at the table, until finally, Shota shrugs, “must’ve been,” he agrees lightly, gaze dropping back to the laptop and continuing to type.

Izuku thinks his soul might’ve left his body in fear at some point. He feels oddly empty.

He moves on autopilot, muttering something about handing out water as he sneaks past his guardian.

“Hey. You have a lot of friends,” Oboro is at his side. His tone is calm, and soothing, speaking to Izuku like he’s a wounded animal, but Izuku just feels cold. That was too close. Izuku faintly remembers the ghost watching from the doorway, so he must’ve seen that too— must've *heard* Shota get so, so close. “They could’ve been talking about anyone, Izuku. Kota doesn’t know I exist, right?”

Izuku nods mutely, handing out the waters.

He watches the cartoon Hitoshi had put on thoughtlessly, sipping at his own water. If Hitoshi notices the haunted fear in his eyes, he doesn’t comment on it, and the kids, thankfully, barely manage a couple sips before promptly passing out.

“Hey, pass me the blanket?”

Izuku blinks out of his thoughts, swallowing down the fear as he turns to look at his friend. Izuku takes a second to piece together Hitoshi’s words, and when he does, he scowls lightly.

“Do I look like your maid?” Izuku quips, cocking an eyebrow.

He lets his friend ease some of the tension he feels at such a close call. Some of the fear nestling in his chest. It's a relief. Shota had come so close to—

This is a needed distraction. "First the water, and now manual labor?"

Hitoshi cocks an unimpressed eyebrow and Izuku can't help but dissolve into a smile, "seriously? C'mon, help a friend out. I'm soo comfy and sooo colddd..."

Hitoshi pauses, cocking his head to the side thoughtfully before he smiles wickedly.

"You know, honestly, you could totally pull off a maid's uniform, I think," Hitoshi teases casually. "Maybe that's what we should do next year for the festival. I bet the girls would love to see that. A maid café. You know Ashido and Hagakure would be all over that."

"You do realize you'd be in a dress too," Izuku reminds, willing the flush off his cheeks.

He stands, balling up the blanket behind him as he steps across the room to hand the blanket.

He doesn't want to risk throwing it and it accidentally hitting a sleeping grade-schooler.

"Actually," Oboro chuckles into his fist, "that sounds like a good attraction..."

"Awh shi—oot. Shoot." Hitoshi glances quickly between the kids before shifting so he can peer into the kitchen where Shota had disappeared. It's a lucky thing the little ones are out like lights. "I did not think that through."

"No, you really didn't." Izuku snickers to himself as Oboro cackles at his side, looking relieved to see Izuku calming down. "I'm tempted to mention it to them now. If I'd look good in a dress, so would you. I'm sure the girls would be able to talk the boys into it—they got most of us to dance today, after all."

"You wouldn't dare," Hitoshi pouts.

"Try me," Izuku deadpans, breaking only with a soft laugh.

Hitoshi accepts defeat at that, pout deepening as he changes the

channel to an All Might film. He plops back into the couch, and hikes the blanket up to his chin, still pouting. Izuku smiles victoriously as he settles back into the loveseat, hyperaware of Oboro curling up on the other cushion.

Izuku appreciates Hitoshi— unknowing of what exactly spooked him but calming him down and assuring him all the same. If his ghost and best friend aren't concerned, he shouldn't be either, right?

Midnight and the Pussycats come by for the sleepy children, and Shota, and a newly home Hizashi, usher both Izuku and Hitoshi into Izuku's room for the night, claiming it's too late for them to be sneaking around the dorms.

It takes some time to fall asleep, honestly, telling himself that Shota is a logical man. If he had concerns, or *suspicions*, he'd say them, right? Right. It's fine. Izuku is fine. Oboro is fine, and the kids didn't ruin anything. His guardians don't know, and he's worried over nothing.

Izuku falls asleep to Hitoshi's soft, evened out breaths at his side, and Oboro humming softly to himself, hunched over his newest romance novel.

Chapter End Notes

> Special guest star Kota! I wanted Eri to have a friend her age, and I actually really like Kota. Apologies if he wasn't completely in character, but he deserved to be a kiddo too. Also, I do think they'd both be insanely possessive of Izuku at first and then easily won over by Izuku saving both of them. And both of them sorta knowing about our favorite ghost boi.
>
> Anyways! Hopefully this wasn't to repetative, or filler chapter-y, and I hope you liked it! As always, comments are so greatly appreciated! I really love reading what you guys have to say!

Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello!

I'm back with another chapter! One more step closer to the end! As always, I had a lot of fun with the content of this chaper, but it was not fun to write. Also! There's a bit of an important author's note in the end notes if you guys could read that before clicking off after finishing this chapter, I'd appreciate it!

And without further ado, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku wakes up in a cold sweat.

He chokes on a dry breath, jerking up to his knees as he heaves for oxygen. His head spins with thoughts, and feelings and... memories that *aren't* his. That had been someone else's memories. He'd just sat in through someone else's memories— *First's* memories.

That had to be First, there was no other explanation.

He blearily remembers first meeting First, after the Hosu incident where Izuku had almost died, but this was different. It was odd seeing First with... an actual body. It had been so long since he'd even heard whispers of the vestiges that he'd almost forgotten what First even looked like.

He didn't look different though, not really, there was just without the familiar ghostly cling to him.

Izuku had come to associate the vestiges with it.

Like at the Sports Festival where Izuku could make out nothing but shadowy figures with glowing eyes, barely there flickers of— well, he isn't really sure what it really is, since no other ghost Izuku had met was like that, maybe flickers of *One for All* clinging to them?

Then he'd seen the same murky, shadowy cling to First when he'd met Izuku in that dream in the hospital. When he'd come within an inch of his own life because he hadn't been careful enough, and hadn't known enough about One for All, or Oboro, or even his ghost seeing ability.

He'd known, distantly, that it was First he was seeing in the dream. First in an actual, solid— *human*— form without the tells that he was a vestige long dead. It was a dream. A dream so clear, so natural as if Izuku could've walked in on the two fighting in real life. It was strange to see him so clearly, looking so *regular*.

Frankly, the only thing that had let Izuku know that it wasn't just a fight happening now, between two living people, was the tendrils of dark, ominous mist clinging to the two men.

Izuku thinks back to the dream, no, the *memory*, and to the man down on all fours as someone stands over him, smiling too sharply to be friendly. Someone called First *little brother*, and with such a familiar voice that Izuku knows if he'd had the freedom to make any sounds at all, he probably would've squeaked in fear.

It was a voice Izuku is sure he'll never forget.

He hadn't spoken to the villain, hadn't even really heard him, but even in his unconscious state his mind had grasped desperately at the sound of *danger*, clinging to it and ingraining it deep into the depths of his mind to the point Izuku is sure he'll always startle at the deep, confidant drawl.

There wasn't a doubt in his mind about who he'd been looking at.

That had been All for One. Young, and cruel and just as powerful, yet without the conniving experience the man mentoring Shigaraki has now. The start of his reign. When he'd forced a Quirk into First's unwilling hands.

He knows All for One looks different after living for so long— his appearance may have changed between that memory and the arrest photos Izuku had seen after All for One had been taken into custody, but you can't change your voice.

Izuku draws in a stuttery breath, reaching up to cover first his mouth with his hand and then drag featherlike fingertips down to his neck— both of which had been consumed by the restraints of One for All as he'd watched the scene unfold before his eyes.

He hadn't been there to speak this time, no, his purpose had been to watch. He was being shown something, the origin of One for All. To see how everything had happened and to understand.

"Hey, Izuku!" Izuku jerks, twisting his body to face the direction of

the shout. His breath catches in his lungs, only to ease out when he spots Oboro leaning over the bed, hand wrapped tightly around Izuku's second hand, clutching at his wrist. One for All flutters across his fingertips. "C'mon, calm down! What's wrong? You almost punched the window! What the hell was that?! Hey. Hey! You with me?"

When Izuku finally clears his head, he manages to nod.

His eyes scan up from the ghost's hands to his face, just about the same eye level as Izuku while he's leaning over the bed, tight grip still restricting Izuku's wrist. They're almost eye to eye.

Oboro looks spooked, and anxious, and Izuku doesn't feel much better than his ghost friend looks. His own gaze scanning Izuku more intently than Izuku had been surveying over him, "are you okay?"

"Yeah," Izuku breathes out, lifting his hand from his neck when he realizes Oboro's eyes keep flicking down to his grip worriedly. He hadn't even realized that's where he left his hand, too busy trying to process what he'd just been walked through.

He realizes next that Oboro still has a tight hold on his other wrist, so he forcefully deactivates One for All, unsure when it had even activated in the first place and gently tugs away from his friend's grip. He stares down at his hand, heart hammering in his chest.

He reaches up to card anxiously though his curls, now shifting from his knees to settle on the edge of the bed, throwing his legs over the side of it and sinking down in exhaustion. Oboro sinks down to his knees on the floor at his bedside, and Izuku's knee accidentally bumps against Oboro's upper arm as they both settle.

The ghost doesn't seem to mind though, readjusting himself until he's sat crisscross on the floor, eyes not drifting away from Izuku for even a second as he does so.

"Yeah," Izuku repeats when he realizes he'd been quiet too long, and that Oboro was studying his worriedly. The word feels dry in his mouth, and Izuku is unsure if he's telling the ghost or trying to convince himself. "Yeah, I'm... good. Okay. I mean. I'm okay."

"Yeah?" Oboro narrows his eyes, and Izuku hears the sarcastic curl as his friend repeats his poor attempt at convincing, "'cause it certainly doesn't look like you're okay. People don't usually shoot up ramrod straight in the middle of the night when they're enjoying a nice calm

REM sleep cycle. You activated your Quirk— almost blew out the window! What happened? Was it a nightmare? You woke up in a panic and you... you were touching your neck. Shigaraki, again?"

"No, nothing like that," Izuku shakes his head, letting his hands fall to his lap as the ghost blinks in confusion, shifting so he's sitting crisscross on the floor of Izuku's dorm.

Izuku scans the room quickly as a brief distraction, eyes settling on the book Oboro had been reading when he'd stumbled into bed last night dropped open, pages down on the floor by the desk.

He must've panicked when Izuku woke up and dropped the book. Izuku feels phantom tingles of restriction on his wrist and imagines Oboro launching up to grab him before he could do any damage to the dorm room, or himself. Izuku feels a wave of guilt blows through his chest, eyes dropping to his lap to avoid looking at Oboro.

"It wasn't a nightmare," Izuku admits, chewing on his bottom lip, "it was a memory..."

"Must've been a bad one if you woke up like that," Oboro frowns, cocking his head to the side, "was it about your mother? Or... your dad? Wanna talk about it? I hear it helps, and I totally won't tell anyone else, y'know? Your secrets are safe with me."

Izuku hesitates, shaking his head, "it... wasn't mine."

"It... wasn't yours?" Oboro repeats in confusion, "alright, hang on, uh, you're going to have to explain that one to me, 'zuku, cause I don't think we're on the same page anymore. You... relived a memory that wasn't yours?"

Izuku nods slowly, bowing his head, "it wasn't my memory, it was someone else's. A... reenactment, I think. Of the past. I... think they're trying to connect with me. He was showing me."

"Who?" Oboro questions desperately, clearly not on Izuku's wavelength.

It's not surprising, Izuku hadn't even mentioned the vestiges since the Hosu hospital stay, and Oboro hadn't entirely been in his right mind as he came to terms with everything. Plus, Izuku had no reason to mention the vestiges when they gave him nothing but radio silence.

"First," Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, shaking his bowed head until

curls curtain his eyes, “and the vestiges. He told me I wasn’t ready before. And they… I don’t know, stepped back? I haven’t heard or felt them— not since they’d helped us during the bootcamp attack. They’ve distanced themselves, but… but I *saw* them. In that dream. I was there with them. They were the clearest I’ve ever seen them. All the vestiges.”

“They’re reaching out again?” Oboro asked, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. “Why? Why now? What did he show you? First? You said it was a memory.”

“I don’t know,” Izuku breathes out. “He was showing me what happened— with All for One. What really happened. They… they really are brothers. He showed me All for One transferring Quirks between people, there’s no doubt in my mind that that wasn’t All for One. They were fighting, everything he showed me, they were always fighting. He… All for One… he’s been building an army— people indebted to him.”

Izuku pauses, swallowing hard.

He thinks about First, the defeat of being locked away by your brother, of being forced into something you don’t want— something you stand *against*. “He locked him up,” Izuku whispers, feeling the ghost’s hand settle on his knee. “He… he forced One for All onto him, Oboro. First didn’t want a Quirk, he struggled, but First was no match against All for One. I… couldn’t help him.”

“It was a memory,” Oboro’s voice is soft, but serious, “he didn’t want help, he wanted you to know.”

Izuku nods stiffly, but it doesn’t make it feel right.

He’d watched First suffer at the hands of his brother. First was the kind of person Izuku *saved*, but he couldn’t. It was as cruel as it was informative to be put in a position where he couldn’t help. “I have to get better,” Izuku tells his friend, “First said I was only using twenty percent of One for All. I need to get stronger; he wouldn’t be telling me this for no reason. Something is going to happen.”

“What?” Oboro startles, “what did he say? How… how do you know?”

“I don’t know,” Izuku admits, “I just… *feel*. He told me not to be afraid, and he said I wasn’t alone. I don’t… know what that means, but… it must mean something. They don’t do anything without cause. I know that. I just… why now?”

“Okay,” Oboro breathes out, looking startled, “okay, uh, yeah, that’s definitely ominous. I still don’t trust that guy, seems sketchy. He didn’t say anything else? Nothing else helpful? He’s the first wielder—he’s gotta have a plan or somethin’, right?”

Izuku shrugs helplessly, shaking his head. “If he does, I’m not ready for it. I need to work harder. I need to get better at using One for All, using *more* of it. I’m not working hard enough.”

“Don’t say that,” Oboro chides sternly, shaking his head in discontent, “you’ve been working your ass off with that Quirk, Izuku. You could hardly *stand* when you got back to the dorms yesterday. Shota probably would’ve benched you instantly if he’d seen you walking around like a zombie. They keep telling you to get better, but no one seems to be offering you any help in doing it!”

“They’re ghosts,” Izuku mutters, “what exactly would you like them to do?”

“I’m a ghost too,” Oboro snaps tiredly, “you don’t see me watching you push yourself into exhaustion and then telling you that *you need to get stronger*. Why can’t they acknowledge that you’re *trying*? Would it kill them to tell you you’re doing *good* instead of constantly reminding you you’re not good enough?”

“We’re talking about a two-hundred-year-old Quirk that I’m not picking up fast enough,” Izuku frowns, pushing himself up off the bed. He moves to the closet, stripping the physical education uniform he’d passed out in off to exchange for his workout clothes. “Shigaraki is going to make a move, and I’m not good enough to stop him yet. First is trying to help me. I do need to get stronger. Twenty percent, Oboro. I can only use twenty percent of the Quirk. Do you think I can beat Shigaraki and All for One with twenty percent?”

“I *think* you’re being too hard on yourself when you’re basically learning this on your own. I *think* those vestiges are pushing a sixteen-year-old who is already in over his head too hard, too fast. I *think* they’re expecting a lot from you when they’re offering you *no help* whatsoever!” Oboro huffs out, pulling himself up off the floor and plopping down on the edge of the bed.

He averts his gaze from the changing teenager. There’s a ruffling of fabrics as Izuku picks through his closet, no doubt looking for his workout clothes. Oboro almost rolls his eyes.

Izuku doesn’t reply, but Oboro honestly hadn’t been expecting him

too. He'd never been good at taking a compliment and accepting that he'd doing just fine when it comes to One for All. Izuku would rather focus on the negatives— pushing himself past the limit to appease and prove himself.

He's definitely a Hero in the making.

"Look," the ghost glares down at the floor, "I think you're doing amazing. You're not ready, he's right about that, and you do need to get stronger, but you're working hard. You're getting it— pretty damn fast too, considering how much time you spend practicing *alone*. You're doing just fine."

Izuku moves away from the closet, and that's when Oboro lifts his gaze back up.

As expected, Izuku is dressed in his workout clothes.

"I appreciate that," the boy sighs, finally looking back at the ghost, "I know you don't like this, and I... get what you're saying, but I can't not keep going. At some point, I'll need to use One for All, and if that point comes and I'm not *ready*, we're all screwed. They're trusting me with One for All— All Might, First, the other vestiges."

"You're going to hurt yourself," Oboro sighs, shaking his head. "You'll run yourself right into the ground. I know this is important, I get it, but don't... forget about you. We're all screwed if you're not ready, sure, but we're also all screwed if you burn yourself out. One for All is still a Quirk at its base, you can and *will* get Quirk exhaustion if you keep going full force."

"I know," Izuku sighs out, setting his hand on his dorm door, "I'll be careful. I promise. And you're always around to tell me to stop if I get out of hand, right? Now, are you going to come running with me, or just sit in here moping?"

"Yeah, cause that's worked so well for me so far. Is it too early to tell you to stop *now*?" Oboro drawls out sarcastically, earning an unamused glance from the green-haired teen.

Oboro sighs heavily as Izuku turns back towards the door, pushing himself up to follow behind his friend. As much as he'd like to mope, he should really keep an eye on Izuku. "You're a psycho. You know you only slept for like four hours, right? Too tired to even change outta your sweat-soaked gym uniform last night, but here you are amped up for a morning run. You're ridiculous."

“I like running,” Izuku huffs under his breath, tugging his door open and stepping out into the silent hallway. There’re no lights, and Izuku is sure his classmates won’t be up for a while. Or he hopes at least. It’s really early. “And I need to be energized for classes today— we're fighting against 1-B, remember?”

“Any sane person would try to get enough sleep to be ready for something grueling like that.”

“I think we’ve already established I’m not sane,” Izuku laughs as he pushes his way out the Heights Alliance doors. The cool early morning breeze cools off his heated cheeks, the sky overhead dark. The sun hasn’t even started rising yet. “I’ll be fine. Besides, I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep after that dream anyways, so I might as well be productive.”

“You’re definitely going to end up in Recovery Girl’s office.”

Oboro knew Izuku was going to push too hard.

He knew that those stupid, all-knowing vestiges would shove him right over the edge of a cliff.

Oboro grits his teeth in annoyance, glaring at Izuku’s unconscious form laid out in the cot in Recovery Girl’s office— wait, no, that’s not entirely true. He’s not glaring *at* Izuku, he decides, he’s simply glaring daggers at One for All, which just so happens to reside *in* Izuku, as if he can isolate it in the boy’s body and glare hard enough that every pushy ghost in that Quirk knows he’s pissed off.

He hopes those vestiges can see him glaring at them, maybe even feel it.

It’s not like anyone else will give them hell for overworking a high school student, so Oboro hopes they can see him now and feel even just an ounce of guilt. They’re supposed to be Heroes, but here they are pushing too hard. Pushing a *kid* too hard.

A *Quirk*.

They’d given him another Quirk.

Oboro doesn’t know what the hell happened during that training exercise; it’s not like Izuku stopped to enlighten Oboro of what the hell had just happened as he’d fallen to his knees and promptly passed

out from, what Recovery Girl had declared to be, Quirk Exhaustion.

Oboro only knows what he'd seen, and what he'd seen was Izuku summoning some *tentacle whip* like thing that had repelled him through Ground Gamma without a care. Oboro's not sure he'll ever forget watching Izuku struggle to contain the chaotic whips of some unknown Quirk that had just been thrust into his hands, crying out in pain as that new, unknown Quirk took his body hostage and put Izuku, and everyone around him, in danger.

And that, if it wasn't already clear enough, is not one of the two Quirks Izuku already possessed. That was not seeing ghosts, or even using a ghost's Quirk like he'd been practicing with Oboro, and it was not what they knew One for All, a power stockpiling Quirk, to be.

In hindsight, Izuku's dream that morning makes much more sense. Oboro had felt off about that dream memory thing Izuku had startled awake from with One for All racing through his veins and pushing out waves of energy that had almost destroyed Izuku's dorm room if Oboro had let him flail his wrist when he'd shot awake.

First had apparently been planning something, and as Oboro expected, Izuku hadn't been prepared.

Yet another thing the poor kid had been tossed into headfirst— like, come on, would it have been so hard for First to offer a bit of a warning?

Oboro grits his teeth and looks away sharply.

It had started off normally. Or, as normal as Yuuei and Shota's class tended to get.

It was Hitoshi's first real integration into the Hero course since he'd been transferred into 1-A. Since his transfer, he'd just been doing core subjects with 1-A, so this'll be the first time he gets to use his Quirk and work with his peers.

The purple-haired teen still doesn't have his Provisional License quite yet, but Shota had deemed him to a point where he could hold his own against the Hero students, and the longer they put off letting Hitoshi work with his classmates, the further behind he was going to get.

He doesn't need a license to work with other students within the safety of the school, so putting it off would just cause larger gaps in

his education.

Plus, Hitoshi should start working with the other Hero students as soon as possible, if just so he can familiarize himself with Quirks and personalities. 1-A, and 1-B to a degree, have been learning one another since day one, whereas Hitoshi is coming into this nearly blindly; everyone had come a long way since the Sports Festival.

Oboro knows that this is more or less Hitoshi's entrance exam, even if he was already a member of 1-A. All Might and Shota had vouched for him, but that was mostly Quirk related. Hitoshi needed to be up to par with 1-A both Quirk wise and physically to really finalize the transfer.

The rules had been simple enough, Hitoshi would be grouped with some 1-A students and fight 1-B, and then he'd be grouped with some 1-B students and fight some 1-A kids.

It was a little wonky considering 1-A's numbers were off now that Mineta was gone and Hitoshi was officially part of 1-A filling that twentieth seat, but Shota had been adamant about Hitoshi working with both classes.

Oboro gets it, you can learn a lot about someone by working with them, but you can learn just as much, if not more, by working against them. Hitoshi needs all the help he can get if he's going to be settling into 1-A entirely when he gets his license at the end of the month.

Most of the fights are four against four, and then there's two battles where it's five against four; one where Hitoshi joins forces with four 1-A kids fighting against four 1-B, and the other where five 1-B kids fight against four 1-A kids.

The last battle is the smallest, Izuku's group, where it's just three against four where Hitoshi is working with the 1-B students against Izuku's group.

Oboro had been the most excited for that match up, especially since Izuku and Hitoshi were so close.

It's always fun seeing friends work together, but it's even more fun watching friends work against one another. Having someone who knows you so well on the opposite team is always a challenge, and it will be for both Izuku and Hitoshi, Oboro is sure.

It started off fine.

Oboro had found himself a nice vantage point where he could sit above the fights, out of the way and still be able to watch all the students below at once. The match ups were pretty good, and Oboro had been surprised that 1-B had managed a win and a draw.

He only knows how good 1-A is, and doesn't know these kids at all, but he's still happy for them. Shota's kids have come such a long way already, so seeing Vlad King's students keeping pace was great. Oboro wonders if he should start sitting in on some of their classes as well, and he probably would it 1-B didn't do Heroics at the same time 1-A did.

He was loyal to Izuku and Shota after all.

He watches the battle, and even finds himself cheering from above for some of the students. Each round is better than the next, and it's really cool just watching the students problem solve, fight and adapt their Quirks and fight styles to get one over on the opposite side.

He doesn't see Izuku after the teams are sorted and everyone is getting ready to start.

Izuku is up with the rest of the students and teachers, and Oboro doesn't want to be a distraction of any sort when Izuku, Uraraka and Ashido are fighting Hitoshi and three 1-B kids, including the loudmouth copycat who's always picking fights. Izuku needs to keep his attention on class and strategizing.

The last fight is about as good as Oboro expects it to be. And he means that both ways— expecting it to be quite the entertaining battle between so many strong students, yet also expecting something to go wrong somewhere.

He just has a bad feeling about today after seeing Izuku jolt awake that morning, expressing no awareness of being awake or One for All. He'd never seen Izuku look like that. Never so startled, so *distant*.

Oboro keeps his distance, stays planted above where he'd been all afternoon while all the students competed and battled. He'd learned his lesson of getting in Izuku's way when there are others around. The Sports Festival had been more than enough trauma to remind Oboro to stay away while Izuku is working with his classmates.

He's not surprised when the blonde, Monoma, targets and provokes Izuku. It's a good strategy, distracting the most physical Quirk on the field first, but Oboro knows Monoma has no filter and will say

whatever he can to rile Izuku up.

Oboro knows all is lost when Monoma mentions Bakugou and All Might.

It's probably the worst thing he could've said, because not only was Bakugou a sore topic for Izuku, Bakugou's distress about the Number One Hero especially, which Monoma had dug into directly, but Izuku also feels guilty still about All Might losing those last embers of One for All.

Oboro winces, spotting, even from afar, how Izuku's expression presses taut in what can only be fury. If he knows Izuku, and he likes to think he does by now, he knows Izuku is preparing to launch into this fight wholeheartedly as if to defend his, Bakugou, and even All Might's honor.

Oboro knows Izuku has a tendency to use *just enough* force to win or apprehend, especially when fighting peers and other students. He is capable of really hurting people, so he often times starts off easy and works his way up in power as he needs it.

Honestly, if anyone was going to push Izuku to the point he blew up, Oboro had always thought it would've been Bakugou, but watching now, Monoma seems know how to push Izuku's buttons perfectly to get a reaction. Maybe the kid just has a natural talent for annoying people?

Oboro had known what was coming the second Monoma mentioned Bakugou, and he's not surprised that Izuku's expression hardens as he grits his teeth and prepares another attack—

He is, however, surprised by the fact that tendrils of black shoot from his arm instead of the blast that Izuku had been lining up to do.

Oboro knows instantly that something is wrong— it might look like some new, exciting aspect or branch of One for All, but it's different, and it's violent. Oboro springs to his feet as the new Quirk flings Izuku around, smashing through pipes and aiming for both Monoma and Hitoshi, who'd been hiding in the shadows.

Oboro had hopped down from his vantage point, internally grateful, for probably the first time ever, that he was a weightless being who could float up to the poor kid. He makes it to Izuku relatively fast, even as the new Quirk jerks him around. Oboro doesn't get too close, but he's comforted by the fact he could help Izuku if need be.

“Izuku!” Oboro had shouted, just trying to get his attention. The black whip strikes through Oboro’s midsection, and it probably would’ve hurt a lot if he wasn’t a ghost. “What the hell is this?!”

“It’s overflowing—” Izuku grits his teeth, shaking his head as he grips at his own wrist to the point Oboro doesn’t think he even has any circulation. The boy’s face twists up in pain, and what little control he’d managed fluctuates.

Oboro silently curses those vestiges.

“Don’t help,” Izuku demands, mouth hardly moving past the pained grimace. Oboro is sure he’s the only one to hear the grumble, and it’s obviously directed at him. “I’m serious, I can handle it.”

“Says the guy getting tossed around like a ragdoll!” Oboro scowls back at the teenager, wincing as the Quirk flicks right through his head. It doesn’t hurt, but it does feel uncomfortable. “I thought they said you weren’t ready!”

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut as he wrestles against his own wrist, the darkness shooting out and clinging to a nearby pipe and dragging Izuku along. Oboro breathes out a snarl under his breath as he shoots off after the Quirk, trailing behind it.

“I can—” Izuku gasps desperately, speaking just loud enough for Oboro to hear as he halfheartedly dodges the wayward flicks of energy. More hit him than he manages to dodge. “I can do it—”

“Hey, you’ve gotta calm down,” Oboro pleads as he moves even closer to the teen, close enough to touch, if need be, “you’re going to hurt yourself! You’re going to hurt *someone*! You can do this, Izuku, it’s just another stupid curve ball those vestiges are throwing at you! Overcome it! Cap it! Like you’ve done with your Quirk! Just for now!”

“Why’re they doing this?” Izuku gasps out, sounding overwhelmed and pained. Oboro doesn’t even think he’d heard him. “I had control, I was getting so good with One for All, I— I can’t control this! I don’t know what this is! I need One for All back! I can control that!”

Oboro doesn’t know what to say, he doesn’t know how to help without disregarding Izuku’s wishes of no contact. All he can do is watch as the new Quirk licks at his arm, slowly but surely consuming him. He doesn’t even know how Cloud would help in this situation, it’s not like he could separate Izuku and the Quirk by a dense cloud when they’re literally attached.

Uraraka grabbing a hold of Izuku takes Oboro by surprise, as does Hitoshi using his Quirk to get Izuku to give up his control. It's really smart honestly, but Oboro can think about that later, when he's not skidding to his knees beside an unconscious Izuku who's laid clutched in Uraraka's arms.

"Shit," Oboro huffs out, anxiously tugging his fingers through blue wavy hair. "Shit! I hope you One for All assholes are happy! *He's not ready*— so, why don't we just throw another new Quirk into his hands, huh? Brilliant, guys!"

Hitoshi joins Izuku down on the ground, dropping to his knees beside Izuku, hands hovering uselessly over the green-haired teen as he surveys over him before his gaze flicks quickly to Uraraka. "Is he okay?"

"Yeah," Uraraka nods breathlessly, staring down at Izuku, "he's not hurt, I don't think. He didn't fall at all. If he's hurt, it'd from the Quirk..."

Hitoshi squeezes his eyes shut and nods, "yeah," he croaks out, "I saw it flinging him around. I knew he wasn't in control; he'd never use force like that on students, and it was aiming for us. Monoma and I."

"I don't know if it was aiming at all," Uraraka shakes her head sharply, "it was just— *attacking*. At random. I was so scared for Deku. As soon as I saw it going after us too, I knew something was wrong."

Hitoshi nods at her point, staring down at Izuku with an unreadable expression.

"I let up my Quirk now," Hitoshi admits after a moment, setting his hand on Izuku's forearm, the one what had been consumed by the Quirk, "right after you two were on the ground. It's all on him now. What the hell was that anyways? Has he always been able to do that?"

"I've never seen that," Uraraka breathes out, shaking her head, "that's... new. I've never seen Superpower do anything like that. He sounded like he was in pain... It's like he had no control all of the sudden. Midoriya is so good with his Quirk now— I-I don't know what happened."

The two students lapse into silence as they watch Izuku closely. He's already starting to stir, expression pinching in almost the same way it had when Izuku had jolted awake that morning.

Oboro readies himself to stop another lashing attack, but it doesn't come.

No one else seems to come to investigate, not the teachers, or the other students in the exercise with them. It's not entirely surprising, since most people just seem to expect weird things from Izuku, so it probably didn't look as bad as it really was.

Still, Oboro wonders where Shota is— he had to have seen that ordeal too, and there's no way he wouldn't be all over Izuku's Quirk doing something weird. After the hypothermia scare, both Shota and Hizashi have been keeping a close eye on the kid.

It's only when Izuku is stirring away, pushing up from Uraraka's lap and absently glancing between his two friends that Oboro spots Shota hanging back, half hidden behind a large pipe, watching closely just out of sight to the students.

Oboro's never seen the man look so torn between stepping back and checking in.

He seems to decide on the former, though, slipping away before Izuku can spot him.

Oboro isn't sure what to think of that, but he knows Izuku would've been upset if he was treated any differently. Shota is good at walking the line between overstepping and letting the kids come to him, and though Izuku is his foster son, in school he's still a student.

Just from seeing Shota's expression, Oboro knows this won't be forgotten or brushed off, even if he is letting Izuku continue. If he's up, conscious and moving, Shota really has no motive to cancel the exercise. That doesn't mean he won't be questioning it later though.

It takes a long second, as Izuku is pushing himself up and assuring his classmates that he's okay, for the green-haired teen to notice Oboro watching from the side, a safe distance away from the chaos of protective students crowding into Izuku's space.

They stare at each other for a long second, and Oboro's throat feels dry as he croaks out, "are you sure you're okay? What happened? What was that?"

Izuku breaks eye contact, deliberately glancing away and flapping a dismissive hand at his side that Oboro knows he's the only one to notice.

Something about the action irks Oboro— it's not like he doesn't have a valid reason to be concerned. Izuku had literally just manifested a new Quirk, had been tossed around by said Quirk and only managed some control of it when he'd lost consciousness.

The ghost heaves a sigh, glancing towards the sky as he considers his options before glancing back down, he's surprised to see Izuku's eyes on him, even if it's just from the side. "Fine," Oboro huffs in defeat, "you win. Whatever. I'll stop asking."

He turns from the boy, exhaustion settling deep in his consciousness, ignoring the surprise and desperation that quickly settle in Izuku's expression as the ghost leaves, phasing through a large pipe until he's gone from sight.

He knows he'd stop in his tracks if Izuku called out, but the teen doesn't, so Oboro leaves without another word.

Izuku just watches him go as he worries his bottom lip between his teeth and halfheartedly assuring Hitoshi and Uraraka that he's feeling fine. Anyone with eyes would be able to see Izuku is definitely not fine, but in the heat of the exercise, no one's going to push.

Oboro supposes he's being petty, reacting like this when he knows Izuku won't be able to defend himself or explain himself without revealing his Quirk to Uraraka, who is still fawning over her teammate.

A small part of him wishes Izuku would just once act without considering who's watching or listening. He wishes Izuku would forget, just for a second, that he's a ghost and just talk to him like they're *friends*.

It's an unfair ask, he knows, but he selfishly wishes Izuku would.

He can't help but feel angry as he settles back up in his vantage point, too worried about Izuku despite everything to even consider leaving, but too angry with Izuku to hang around any closer.

He draws into himself, watching the exercise continue on as if Izuku hadn't just manifested a dangerous new Quirk that had run amok with the teen in tow; aiming to hurt people and damaging the course. He doesn't know how everyone can just continue after watching that— the students, the teachers.

Maybe it's his outsider point of view, years of just watching what goes

on within the walls of Yuuei from the sidelines and actually *thinking* about what they're doing; considering everything.

This won't be forgotten, Oboro knows as much, but still, how can they so easily brush it aside? Pretend it's normal when everyone knows this isn't something Izuku had been capable of before.

Oboro draws his knees to his chest, setting his chin in the gap as he watches Izuku and Uraraka now fighting Monoma. Hitoshi is gone from the fight, but Oboro sees him lurking with his capture weapon in hand.

Hitoshi obviously wants to fight Izuku head on, but Oboro can't find it in himself to be excited for the rematch. Frustration has settled in his chest, and it's been so long since he'd felt like this.

The fight gets interesting, everyone doing their part to beat the other side, trying to get the upper hand in the fight. Everyone uses their Quirks, Izuku even managing to actually use that new Quirk of his, even after it's traumatic manifestation.

It's not long until everything comes to an end, team 1-A winning this round and the most battles overall.

After the event is announced as finished, 1-A the victors, Izuku takes exactly two steps towards his peers and promptly passes out. Oboro's heart is launched into his throat and he's at Izuku's side before he even realizes it.

Oboro is quickly joined by Shota, then Hitoshi and the rest of the teachers. 1-A, as well as a few 1-B students make an attempt to crowd in as well until Nemuri ushers them back as she calls for one of Recovery Girl's medical bots.

Shota is checking Izuku's pulse and breathing and doesn't seem overly worried as he does so, despite the downward curl of his lips and the exasperation clouding his features. Shota mutters something about probable Quirk Exhaustion to All Might and Vlad, which is relayed back to the students.

Some of Oboro's worry saps out of his body, but he knows he can't relax entirely until Recovery Girl gives the same diagnosis. She at least knows about One for All, so if something's not right, she'll be able to pinpoint it, right?

Oboro knows All Might doesn't know what's happening; he looks just

as confused as Oboro feels.

And that's how he finds himself here, staring down at Izuku and silently wishing those vestiges were able to come out of the Quirk. He now, more than ever, wants to throw hands with a two-hundred-year-old vestige. He'd joked before, but the more he sees of the vestiges little regard for the currently wielder, the more pissed off he gets.

Oboro hopes First is really just trapped in the Quirk, and not a coward who's too afraid to face what he's doing to Izuku. This isn't right. There's nothing about this Quirk that is right. Dead vestiges should not be pushing so hard for perfection from a high schooler who already has everything else on his plate.

Why is Oboro the only ghost who sees that?

Who can consider the fact that Izuku is capable of great things, but won't ever get there if he runs himself into the ground before he can? You can only lift so much weight before your knees buckle.

They're just suffocating him under another Quirk when he can't even handle thirty percent of the first one is not how you teach someone.

Oboro draws in a shaky breath, scanning the length of the teenager's supine frame. He always looks small when he's swaddled in hospital whites. There's just something about it that makes someone look tiny, even on Recovery Girl's small cots.

Oboro glances over at the clock, frowning to himself as another hour ticks by.

He stares off into space thoughtfully, turning the day's events over in his head. Is there anything he could've done differently? Had there been any way he could've actually helped during that manifestation? Would Izuku still be here now if Oboro had been more persistent that morning?

It's the ruffling of sheets that draws in his attention.

He refuses to admit he startles, attention jumping to the side where a very drowsy Izuku squints at him.

"Hey," Izuku's dry voice greets softly. "Am I... alone?"

"Just me," Oboro grits his teeth, looking away sharply. He thinks back to earlier, Izuku dismissive flicks of his hand, and clenches his jaw

harder as the hurt settles once again not that the teen is awake. "*But*, I can go. You don't need me around; you've made yourself clear on that."

"That's not what I—" Izuku groans lightly, pushing himself up. He scans the room quickly, verifying, before continuing, "you know that's not what I meant. I knew you were here; I meant Shota, or Hizashi, or even Recovery Girl. Not you, never you. I was talking *to* you. What... do you mean I've made myself clear?"

Oboro remains silent, staring daggers at the wall he's facing. He just knows if he looks back at Izuku he'll break and lose his composure.

"Wait... you're mad at me." Izuku breathes the statement out like it surprises him, a strange distant dip to his tone, "I... knew you were upset when you left like that, but I don't..."

"What gives you that idea?" Oboro refuses to look back, voice laced with sarcasm. He sees Izuku wince out of the corner of his eye, and bites down on the guilt he feels for causing it. "It's not like I *warned* you about this— it's not like I *predicted* this exact thing happening just this morning when you refused to slow down. What would I have to be *upset* about?"

Izuku shoots Oboro a look, shifting so he's sitting a bit more upright, "you're mad that I manifested a new Quirk?"

"No! I'm mad that you keep brushing me off!" Oboro fumes, whipping around to face the teen. "Not *everything* is about that stupid Quirk! I'm mad that you have zero regard for yourself! I'm mad that every time I try to help you, you brush me off and ignore me! I'm mad that you tell me you'll listen to me, but just— just *flap your hand* and expect me to leave when it's inconvenient for you!"

Izuku looks thoroughly scolded, hands dropping into his lap like a scolded schoolboy as he watches Oboro with wide eyes. Oboro can't even find it in himself to be sympathetic, or apologetic, as his frustration finally seeps out.

He's only distantly aware of the fact Izuku just woke from Quirk Exhaustion.

"I get it, I'm a ghost." Oboro snaps, ignoring how Izuku's expression twists into something Oboro can't place. "I know that you'll never see me like you see everyone else. I'll always be on the sidelines, and I— I don't *mind* that. I've accepted that. I know what I am, but I also know

I care about you. I've watched you from the moment you got that Quirk, the first time you ever used it. I see what you're doing to yourself!"

"I'm not—"

Oboro turns away sharply, scoffing harshly and accidentally cutting Izuku off.

He's aware of his voice wavering as he continues, "I see you pushing yourself and I get it. I know this is important. I know that people are counting on you to master One for All, and that you've got this weird '*I don't need anyone*' complex that you hide behind because trusting people is scary. I get it."

"Oboro..."

"No," the ghost snaps, glaring at the boy in the infirmary cot. "Look, you tell me we're friends. You tell me that you trust me. Just this morning you told me you'd listen to me, but even when I... when I *try* to help you, you brush me off. You look like shit, Izuku. You're exhausted. You're overworked. You're wearing yourself too thin between school, and life, and your Quirk and One for All— keeping all these *secrets*!"

"I have to keep these secrets," Izuku mutters, voice soft.

He hasn't once let his volume rise, but Oboro knows that's just because Recovery Girl is in the adjoining office, waiting for Izuku to wake up. If he alerts her to his awakeness, their conversation is over.

The door is mostly closed though, and Oboro knows she'd fully invested in her injury reports. He'd accidentally pushed the chair he was sitting in back earlier, the legs scraping against the ground, and the woman hadn't come in to investigate.

"No, you don't," Oboro refutes tightly, "do you know what would change if you let Shota and Hizashi in on either of your secrets? You'd have *support*. You'd have *boundaries* that you're too selfless to set for yourself. You'd have someone to talk to who isn't a ghost, you'd have people who actually *understand* you. They don't care what you have, Izuku, they *love* you."

"You don't know that," Izuku looks away sharply, followed by a lighter, "you *know* I can't."

“No, I don’t,” Oboro groans. He hates it when they walk in circles like this. He hates when Izuku is so blinded by people who’ve hurt him in the past to accept that people will actually *accept* him. “You can’t keep letting this happen. You’re in the infirmary, and it’s not because of broken bones. They’re going to catch on. You manifested a whole entirely new Quirk and I know it won't be long before those vestiges spring something else on you— they're not stupid, Izuku.”

“There will be more,” Izuku admits, and for a second, Oboro is confused. “You asked me. Back in Ground Gamma. There’ll be seven total. Quirks. One for All and... and this Quirk included. The vestige, Banjo-san, told me so when I, um...” the teen bites his lips, looking unsure how to continue.

“Willingly surrendered your consciousness to Hitoshi’s Brainwashing Quirk in a flimsy attempt to make it stop?” Oboro’s face twists up like he’d eaten a slice of lemon. “So there’s a chance this might happen *five* more times. Wonderful. This just keeps getting better and better. I’m starting to think I was *right* about those Quirk ghosts, by the way.”

“It’s called Blackwhip,” Izuku continues slowly, as if Oboro hadn’t said a word. “You asked earlier. Well, that’s what it is. It’s an emitter type powered by emotions, I think. Anger, mostly. I couldn’t... hold onto it. It was just so powerful. I was just so mad at Monoma talking about Kacchan and All Might, and it’s not entirely Kacchan’s fault— not even really his fault at all and...”

“I get it,” Oboro scoffs lightly, “I could tell you were angry. Monoma pushed all the right buttons to piss you off, I just didn’t think you’d...”

“Yeah,” Izuku breaths out, shaking his head, “me neither.”

Izuku is quiet for a second, watching the ghost.

Oboro feels his gaze on him but refuses to look back.

“I don’t mean to, you know.”

“What?” Oboro finally looks back, quirking an eyebrow.

“Brush you off,” Izuku whispers, picking at a thread on the glaringly white blanket pooled in his lap. “It just happens. I always... I’ve always gotta be conscious of who’s around and when... we’re not alone, I just...”

“Yeah,” Oboro says flatly, “I get it. It’s fine.”

“I didn’t know you felt like that.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Oboro shakes his head dismissively.

“No,” Izuku frowns, genuinely distraught. “It does. It matters to me. You are my friend, and I... I don’t see you differently, but you are different. I know I... subconsciously withdraw sometimes. All my life I’ve been in tune to ghosts and keeping quiet around them because socializing with them is what drove people away. It’s what flagged me as different. I learned long ago that being different isn’t something you want to be. But I never... considered what that might be like for you.”

“I get it,” Oboro mutters again. He does get it. He knows Izuku as well as anyone, if not more considering all the time they spend together. “You don’t have to defend yourself to me. I know this is your secret—”

“I’m not defending myself,” Izuku shakes his head, shifting slightly, “I... really didn’t know you felt like that. It makes sense, I’ve never considered... I didn’t even realize I was doing it. I— I never meant to hurt you. I’ve never been close to a ghost, not since meeting you and I never... thought my habits would hurt you.”

“I know,” Oboro bites the inside of his cheek. He knew Izuku hadn’t done any of it on purpose. The kid was far too kindhearted for that. “Look, I don’t blame you and I didn’t mean to guilt you—”

“You should’ve told me earlier,” Izuku mutters, finally catching Oboro’s eye. His lips are pinched chidingly, and his arms lace over his chest. “You know, for a guy getting on my case about *trusting* and *honesty*, you sure have been holding back.”

“Our situations are a bit different,” Oboro scoffs, but he does offer a small half smile.

Oboro doesn’t have the heart to remind Izuku that he barely exists outside of Izuku himself. At the end of the day, he’s still a ghost. Izuku just has this weird power of making Oboro feel like a ghost, but also making him feel completely human as well.

“Not to me,” Izuku hums back. “I’m glad I know now. I’ll... I’ll try to break that habit. I still can’t, y’know, talk to you with others around, but I’ll try not to brush you off. Especially when you’re concerned or trying to help me. I knew that’s what you were doing, but I still... I’ve been an ass, so I’m sorry.”

Oboro tries to ignore the fluttering fondness he feels for his friend,

bowing his head thankfully, “thank you.”

“Tell me when I’m being an insensitive jerk,” Izuku continues, “just like I tell you when you overstep. You’re allowed to have feelings, Oboro. You’re allowed to be angry with me and to tell me off when I deserve it. And I do value your opinion, even if it didn’t look like it before. You’re always just trying to help, and you’re honest with me when no one else seems to be. You’re my best friend, and I’ve been taking your presence for granted. I need to listen to you more.”

“Finally, something we agree on,” Oboro huffs playfully, fighting down the flush threatening to consume his cheeks, “now, stop it with the compliments, or you’ll make me *blush*.”

Izuku smiles, soft and personal, a look Oboro doesn’t see very often, “I’m sorry I didn’t realize sooner.”

“No worries. It’s hard to worry about something like that when you’re already struggling to keep your secrets straight,” the gravity of the situation is back, churning Oboro’s stomach unpleasantly. “You know everyone hates seeing you here, right? You’re so busy trying to be the perfect wielder, and busy training and learning all these Quirks that you let yourself suffer in the process. We care about you, dude.”

“I know,” Izuku sighs, palming at his eyes. “Maybe you’re right. I mean, would it really be so bad to let one or two people in on One for All? Shota is my homeroom teacher. If they’re warned up front of the dangers and they... accept the risks, why couldn’t I tell them?”

“Hang on,” Oboro jerks up in surprise, narrowing playfully accusing eyes on Izuku, “what now? Who are you, and what have you done with my secretive, *I’d-rather-die-then-talk-to-anyone-about-my-problems* Izuku-kun?”

“Shut up,” Izuku flushes brightly, the colour looking healthy on his pale, exhausted complexion. There’re dark rings under his eyes from the lack of sleep, and you can see how dull and tired his eyes look.

Oboro wishes he'd pushed harder that morning for Izuku to go back to bed, or even just *not* go for an hour-long run, but he knows Izuku wouldn’t have listened. He’s bullheaded, just like every other Hero Oboro knows.

There’s something about this though, that has Oboro easing into his chair and letting the tension in his shoulders ease. It’s something that feels right.

Like they're *right* again. The banter is slowly returning, and the dark, suffocating air in the room easing to the regular light, friendly one. Oboro hates being mad at people. If being a ghost has taught him anything, it's that holding onto anger is a trivial thing.

Having it is healthy, holding it is just a pain.

Izuku quirks his head lightly to the side, watching Oboro with a knowing look, "I said I was going to listen to you more, didn't I? You've been very *vocal* about this, from like the moment you knew. Maybe... Look, I can't tell anyone about *my* Quirk. I just can't do it. But... I don't know if I can handle five more Quirks alone. It was already hard enough getting a handle of Blackwhip today, and I still have so much work to do to trust it as a tool. And there's One for All too, and I'm... in over my head."

"Admitting you have a problem is the first step to fixing your problem," Oboro says offhandedly, words coming out like he's quoting something. Izuku eyes him silently until Oboro glances back with a cheeky smile, "I watch a lot of commercials. It works for you too though, universal words of wisdom!"

"Uh huh," Izuku snorts a quiet laugh under his breath. "Anyways, Shota is probably already onto me, especially after Blackwhip manifested today, and he does know about me being a late bloomer. It wouldn't be too surprising, right?"

"He is already halfway there," Oboro agrees, "and he is definitely onto you. He, Nem, All Might, Vlad and Nezu are all having a meeting right now. I would've been there but... I didn't wanna leave you alone. I do know they're confused though, I mean, manifesting a completely new Quirk is practically unheard of, kiddo."

"Right," Izuku winces nervously, "I have to tell All Might first. I can't spring this on him."

"And if he says no?" Oboro cocks his head in question.

Izuku shoots him a flat look, "I said tell, not ask."

Oboro lets out a low whistle, "you're really serious about this, huh?"

"I can't keep doing this alone. I need help— seven Quirks... is *a lot*. All Might is a good mentor but... I need a good *teacher* too. Yagi-san and I are very different people, we don't struggle the same, and One for All has obviously reacted differently between us. If One for All is only

going to get stronger, I need people to talk to. I need people I trust. I'll always need All Might in this but... All Might had Gran Torino, right? He never had One for All in his possession so... maybe Shota can be my Gran Torino."

"It's a solid argument," Oboro shrugs, "frankly, he shouldn't have a say in who you tell. You shouldn't have to enforce your decision. One for All became your secret when All Might passed it down knowing all the risks that came with it."

"I still look up to him though."

"And that won't change," Oboro frowns thoughtfully, "look, if he cares about you, he'll be okay with you needing more help. He never mentioned anything about *more Quirks*, so I bet this is getting out of hand for him too. If the options are watching you drown alone, or letting you cling to a life preserver that Shota happens to be the one throwing, any well-meaning adult would choose the latter."

Oboro hesitates, "and if he doesn't... maybe you don't need energy like that in your life."

"Yeah," Izuku agrees distantly, "you're right."

The teen is quiet again, mouth pressed downward in a thoughtful frown as he lifts his gaze to the ceiling and stares for a moment. Oboro doesn't want to disturb the comfortable silence they'd settled into, so he just sits at the boy's bedside, letting his eyes fall shut.

It's Izuku clearing his throat that breaks Oboro from his thoughts, "so, what... uh, what actually happened? I mean, I'm in the infirmary, but I felt fine after Blackwhip was under control. It's all sorta..." Izuku gestures a hand, biting at his lip, "foggy."

"You were an idiot who really should've listened to his ghost friend," Oboro snaps, voice holding no real heat. "You passed out in front of your teachers, classmates and 1-B. You scared the shit out of everyone because you don't know when to take a *break*. You've been unconscious for seven hours, you know? This is exactly what I was talking about this morning, if only you'd had this '*listen to Oboro*' epiphany earlier."

"I passed out?" Izuku whispers, looking surprised. He bites hard at his bottom lip, "in front of everyone? Yikes, that's embarrassing."

"Well, Quirk manifestations take a lot of energy," Oboro states

sharply, aware Izuku already knows this. “You were already exhausted, and then you manifested that *thing*, Blackwhip or whatever, and it used up your energy. Then, like an *absolute* idiot, you brushed off your exhaustion again and used One for All and that new Quirk to finish the battle. You hit the ground as soon as the adrenaline of the battle wore off.”

“I… actually sort of remember that,” Izuku hums out, “’toshi and I were fighting each other, weren’t we? I think… my team won in the end, right? That’s all I remember.”

“Hard to remember things you’re unconscious for,” Oboro chides sarcastically.

Izuku puckers his lips in offense, “why do I get the feeling you’re not going to let this go for a while?”

“Why do I get the feeling *you’re correct*.”

“Izuku?”

Both Izuku and Oboro startle up, attention shooting to the door. Shota stands in the infirmary door, and just a second later, Recovery Girl peeks out from her adjoining office.

“Oh, Dearie,” the old woman tuts, “I didn’t hear you stir, have you been awake long?”

“No, Ma’am,” Izuku shakes his head, rubbing at eyes that suddenly look a lot more tired than before. Oboro snorts to himself at the fact, then snickers when the teen shoots him an annoyed sideways glance.

“How are you feeling, Kid?”

Oboro lets himself fall through the chair as Shota steps into the room, plopping down into the chair. Izuku chews on his lip to keep from smiling as the ghost groans from the floor before promptly pushing himself up and perching on the edge of Izuku’s cot.

“Tired,” Izuku finally admits.

“That’s to be expected,” Recovery Girl chides as joins them by the bed, settling at Izuku’s side and scanning him sharply, “that was a bad case of Quirk Exhaustion, Dearie. You were out cold by the time you arrived here, but from Aizawa here’s account, it was definitely overexertion and Quirk overuse; a draining manifestation if nothing

else."

"Speaking of," Shota interjects, watching Izuku calmly, "care to explain what that even was? The new move out there didn't look anything like Superpower, Izuku, so what the hell was that?"

"Shota-kun, Dear," Recovery Girl taps the bottom of her cane against Shota's knee with probably more force than necessary, "the boy just woke. Give him some time to collect his thoughts and be a doting, concerned dad after that. Waiting a moment won't kill you, I assure."

"I didn't— I wasn't—" the dark-haired man blinks, face contorting into what Izuku thinks may be embarrassment of being called out by the old woman. Shota scrunches his nose up, letting his hair fall into his face as he turns sharply away from her and Izuku, "yes, Ma'am."

"He's *blushing*!" Oboro teases loudly, perking up and leaning towards the Underground Hero as if Shota could see and hear him. "Awe, Shocchan! So soft for the son you *love*! See, 'zuku, I told you they loved you. He wouldn't react like this if RG didn't hit the nail right on the head, right?"

"Also," the ghost adds slyly as Izuku leans back in the pillows, "notice how he didn't *deny* it. That's a total dad right there. *Your* total dad."

Izuku sinks into the pillows even further, silently glad he's the only one who has to suffer hearing Oboro.

He lets his eyes slip shut and settles into the silence of the room as Recovery Girl bustles around, sorting out some vitamin gummies she's insisting he take before she even considers discharging him, and Shota texts, probably Hizashi.

He silently mourns this peace, knowing it won't be the same when he asks to speak to All Might before explaining anything to Shota. He hopes his guardian isn't too upset and... he also really hopes All Might doesn't get in trouble like last time.

Chapter End Notes

> Oboro has just been the bestest boy for far too long. I wanted to give him some emotion and reactions to Izuku manifesting Blackwhip. Izuku just needed to see for himself that his actions affect not just himself, probably the only way you could teach that kid self preservation.

Now, a bit of bad news for everyone: My laptop is giving up on me after eight long years together and I can't get a new one just yet! It's not dead yet, so I'll keep going, but I get very frusterated when it doesn't load up the drafts and I have to keep restarting it because it freezes. Writing just isn't much fun when the keyboard is being a jerk— sentences get randomly deleted, it's started adding random letters when I backspace and the 'e's are still iffy.

I know I'm not entirely consistant in updates, but it's not me this time :(All that said, as long as it turns on and runs, I'll still be writing, but if it does die there might not be an update for a while. Just as a bit of a heads up! It's still struggling along, so fingers crossed it'll be fine!

Anyways! As always, comments are greatly appreciated and I do love reading what you guys have to say! Thanks so much for taking the time to read, and I hope you enjoyed! We're coming up to the end and things will really start to happen, so be prepared!
<3

Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Hello again! I am so terribly sorry about the wait, I just haven't had the time, or the motivation to de much writing for specific reasons I'll explain in the end notes if you're curious. This chapter also gave be a hard time with trying to put emotion in there without it being 'to much' you know?

Anyways! I have some more wonderful fan art for you guys to check out if you feel so inclined! First off, we have this fanart of our boys chatting in the coffee shop from a couple chapters ago by the Ao3 user ode_to_clear. Next, we have this beautiful art by the user atagarock on Tumblr and Ataga here on Ao3. And the last fanart made for us (which I apparently never responded to? I am so sorry! I responded in my heart D:) comes from @iiolivialuv in Twitter, and Amari7 here on Ao3! All credit due to the amazing artists! Show them all some love!

Thank you so much to everyone who makes art for this fic, I absolutely adore that something I made inspires you guys to be creative too. It always made me so happy to see what you guys have made! Also, apologies if I've ever forgotten to tag anyone's art, I have the attention span of a goldfish, so please remind me if I miss something that I said I'd post!

And, now that that's been taken care of, on with the story :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How are you feeling, Dearie?”

Izuku blinks his eyes open to glance tiredly at Recovery Girl, frowning thoughtfully in a self-assess of sorts before forcing his shoulders into a shrug. “’m okay.”

“He says while confined to a cot in the nurse’s office after overusing not one, but *two*, Quirks,” Oboro snorts from his position, not opening his eyes, or even angling his head in Izuku’s direction.

At some point, he’d flopped down backwards across the foot of Izuku’s bed, and was just relaxing with his eyes closed in the silence of the Nurse’s office while Izuku slept off the worst of the overexertion, quietly letting Izuku recover from the nausea and fever that came with

Quirk Exhaustion.

The nurse hums out in acknowledgement, stepping closer towards him.

She gently presses her palm over his forehead, humming to herself once again. “Looks like your fever is finally starting to break,” her hand moves down to his cheek, “how’s the nausea?”

“It’s okay,” Izuku tells her softly. “I think it’s passing now too.”

“That’s good to hear, Dearie.” Recovery Girl offers a tiny smile, patting his cheek gently before pulling away and turning towards a locked cabinet of medications. She unlocks it fluently and rummages around for something, continuing without looking back at Izuku, “if you’re healing at this rate, I’ll consider discharging you to Shota-kun this afternoon. Just so you know, that means going up to the campus apartment with him where he can keep an eye on you, and not returning to your dorm.”

“Really?” Izuku cocks his head to the side in surprise.

Only two of his classmates had been brought to the Nurse’s office with Quirk Exhaustion— Kaminari, who’d accidentally electrocuted himself and a pond during a training exercise, and Uraraka who’d tried to use her Quirk on all nineteen of their classmates at once a few weeks into the school year— and both had been made to stay overnight so Recovery Girl could keep an eye on them.

Izuku should know, they’d both complained very vocally about Recovery Girl’s strict ‘rest’ policy.

“Don’t look surprised,” the woman chides playfully, turning back to him with what looks to be an anti-nausea medication. “I’m only considering it because I know how much of a helicopter parent Shota-kun can be. That started long before he took you in, Dearie.”

“She’s right,” Oboro snorts fondly, “I think at this rate, RG is probably the lesser of two evils for you, dude. Shota’s a worry wart, and unfortunately for you, he’s channeling all that energy into *you*, his reckless son.”

The woman laughs fondly to herself, taking Izuku’s hand and shaking two small pill capsules into his palm, “that boy knows how to deal with Quirk Exhaustion just as well as I do. Was always so worried about those little friends of his always overworking themselves,

Hizashi-kun and that Shirakumo boy. Three peas in a pod, those boys. It was rare to see one without at least one of the others, if not both, trailing after them."

Izuku freezes at the mention of Oboro, and even Oboro pushes himself up to stare at the old woman in shock. Izuku's mouth goes dry as he holds the pills in his hand, watching the nurse head towards the water cooler she has in her office.

People don't talk about Oboro— and never as casually as this.

"Really?" Izuku croaks out, eyes staring to Oboro before returning to the nurse's back.

"Oh yes," she hums back, "reckless group they were. Hell-bent on pushing their Quirks to the utmost limits, without a single regard for themselves. When it wasn't Shota-kun here, it was Hizashi-kun, and when it wasn't Hizashi-kun, it was Shirakumo-kun. All three of them laid exactly where you are, Dearie. Hizashi-kun and Shirakumo-kun more so than Shota-kun."

"Hey now," the ghost pouts, knees pulled into his chest like he's listening to a grandmother's story or something. The ghost always looks so giddy when people talk about him unprompted. "I wasn't always here— and *Cloud* was hard to master! Do you know how many times I fell on my ass because my cloud density was off? And sure, when I tried to make more than one cloud I got a *little* sick..."

"Shota-kun was never far behind though," the woman huffs fondly to herself, as if remembering a teenaged Shota trailing along after Oboro, or Hizashi into the Nurse's office. "Hardly left their sides, and asked plentiful of questions on how to help. Shota-kun was quite the little nurse's aide back in the day, when it came to those two. Always such a caring young man. I think for the longest time I, and those little friends of his, were the only ones to see the caring young man behind the gruff exterior. I'm glad to see him embracing it these days."

"He used to get so shy," Oboro chuckles fondly, chin resting on his knee as he watches Izuku, "whenever RG would tease him. I remember that. Pretended he didn't care, but never left us. Hovered, but would tell us off if we mentioned it. It was nice to never be alone in this place, and RG had a soft spot for us, I think, hardly ever chased us out."

Recovery Girl hands Izuku the paper cup of water she'd been grabbing and he quickly swallows the pills and chases them with a gulp of

water. When the water is gone, he fiddles with the cup.

“Anyways,” Recovery Girl shakes her head, leaning heavily on her cane, “enough about that. I think we should chat about this new Quirk of yours, and what it’s doing to you.”

Izuku swallows, blinking surprised eyes at the school nurse.

He’d known this was coming, he just didn’t expect it to come from Recovery Girl first. For the most part, she’d deliberately paid One for All no attention. Nothing but snide little comments to Yagi-san, or scolding Izuku for hurting himself with it, and it was all behind closed doors.

He supposes a second Quirk manifestation is a good place to draw the line.

He’s just glad Shota had stepped out to call Hizashi and explain what had happened.

Hizashi is currently out on a mission with his Agency, so at least whatever happens, it’s just Shota he’s revealing everything to first, and if he knows Shota, which he likes to think he does at this point, Shota won’t hesitate to clue Hizashi into everything.

Izuku doesn’t expect Shota to keep anything a secret from his husband, especially when it involves himself, who is currently their ward, but he’d much rather Shota break the news then having to tell the blonde himself.

“I am very aware this is a secret, Dearie, but when I agreed to keep this secret, it’s was *one* Quirk. One Quirk that I wasn’t happy about when seeing the repercussions of you using it, but one Quirk nonetheless. When I agreed to keep this secret, I did not agree to watching you hurt yourself repeatedly. I’ve been lenient— Yagi-san assured me that you’d get the hang of it eventually, and you did after many, many visits to my office. I apologize I’ve let this carry on as long as I have.”

Izuku looks down towards his lap, feeling like he’s being scolded, even when he knows he’s not.

“I can’t just ignore a *second* Quirk manifesting, Midoriya-kun,” Recovery Girl shakes her head, “I’m a medical practitioner, and I simply cannot allow you to go about learning a second Quirk the way you learned the first. This is not something anyone was prepared for. I

let Yagi's teaching slide the first time around, but I can't a second time knowing what's to come. You need proper Quirk counselling. You need proper training, and Yagi simply isn't equipped to offer you that to the capacity you'll need."

Izuku finally forces his gaze up, blinking owlishly at Recovery Girl's stern expression.

"I don't care what Yagi says, your health and safety comes first to that Quirk he bestowed upon you, Dearie. Either the two of you tell Aizawa about One for All and what it's doing to you, or I tell him myself. I refuse to keep a secret that has been hurting you, and will potentially hurt you even more now that it's *growing*."

"I... I know," Izuku breathes out, fiddling with the hem of the blanket. "I want to tell him, just... I have to warn All Might first. I don't... need *agreement*, but I need him to at least *know* first."

"Very well. Glad to see you have some common sense up in that head of yours, Dear," the old woman teases, expression still serious. "You should be starting Quirk training with that new Quirk of yours as soon as possible, so don't put this off. We both know what that first Quirk did to your poor body, and I don't want a repeat of that. The next time I see you in this office because of a Quirk and you haven't told your teacher, I will tell him myself, understand?"

"I understand," Izuku says dutifully.

"Ah," Izuku whips towards the door when a new voice speaks, followed by a light rapping of knuckles against a doorframe. Izuku jerks up when he notices Yagi-san in the doorway, smiling sheepishly, "I just came by to check on young Midoriya. Should I come back later?"

"Speak of the devil," the old woman huffs under her breath to Izuku before continuing loud enough for Yagi-san to hear, "no, no need. We're finished talking. The child needs rest, but you're welcome to chat with him. Aizawa-san should be returning soon, so you keep the boy company until then. He's to be resting, and I won't hesitate to kick you out, Yagi-san."

"Duly noted," the man bows his head respectfully.

The woman nods to herself, clearly satisfied with the reply. She heads towards her office, hesitating in the door way for just a second, "I'll just be in here if either of you need me. Just call for me, and I'll be

right out."

She closes herself into the small room before anyone can say anything more.

Izuku stares at the closed door for a moment until someone clearing their throat draws in his attention.

Izuku tenses up before looking at Yagi-san, who is still hesitating in the doorway like he's waiting for Izuku to invite him in. He takes a second to process that in and of itself, before he's awkwardly gesturing the man in. The retired Pro is quick to obey the invitation.

"Young Midoriya," he greets softly, "how are you feeling?"

"Okay," Izuku admits tiredly, "still a bit nauseous, and I think I still have a fever, but Recovery Girl said I could leave later today if I continue to improve. I'd much rather be at home then in the nurse's office."

"That's great to hear, my boy," Yagi-san offers a small smile. He's quiet for a long second, just watching Izuku before he sighs deeply and looks away, "listen, Midoriya-kun, I... think we need to talk. About... about what happened today."

"Yeah," Izuku agrees shyly, "I think we do. But... um, there's something else I wanted to talk to you about first. It's... it's pretty important, I think."

"Oh?" Yagi-san looks back towards Izuku in surprise, "well, you first, my boy. What's on your mind?"

Izuku swallows, looking at his mentor before looking away quickly. He fiddles more insistently with the blankets, biting at his bottom lip, "I just... um, I wanted to tell you that I'm... well... Look, I know One for All is a secret, and-and you're a really good mentor, but I just think... I, uh, I, well—" Bite the bullet, Izuku. What's the worst he can do? Tell you no? You don't need his approval; this is just courteous. "—I think it's time we tell Shota about the Quirk. M-maybe?"

"Smooth," Oboro snorts from the foot of the bed, pushing himself up so he's sitting cross-legged on the far corner. "You really told 'im, 'zuku. Where's the '*I said tell, not ask*' attitude from earlier, huh? Sounded pretty ask-y to me."

Izuku tries hard not to react to the ghost, but he can feel his cheeks

darkening with a faint flush at being called out. So he lost a bit of nerve when he was *actually* talking to the Pro, sue him.

“You want to tell Aizawa about the Quirk?” All Might blinks owlishly, like he’s trying to process the words. “My boy—”

That’s what prompts Izuku on, as if he needs to prove his case, “I just... he already sorta knows, you know? He knows that I got my Quirk late, and he... he’s really helped me learn how to deal with it. I don’t think I’d be where I am right now if it wasn’t for his help, you know? He wasn’t even u-upset.”

Izuku swallows hard, fiddling with his own fingers as he feels the Pro’s gaze on him, watching Izuku intently.

Izuku can only hope he’s pleading his case here as he continues, voice a nervous stutter, “and... well, a *new* Quirk is a lot, and I’ll be getting *more*, and I just... You’re a really great mentor, and I’m so glad you’re willing to help out, but we don’t know what we’re doing, and I know Shota and, and even *Hizashi* have experience with Quirk training and... and Quirk counselling and I just—” Izuku sucks in a breath when he starts to falter breathlessly, “I just can’t learn anymore Quirks how I learned One for All. This new Quirk... it's *not* One for All, not even close and... and we were out of our depth *before*, how... how are we supposed to do it alone now when I’ll be getting even more Quirks?”

Yagi stares at him for a long, long second, blinking owlishly as he opens and shuts his mouth like he can’t figure out what to say until: “Even *more* Quirks? Apart from the new *one* you manifested today? You’ll be getting *additional* Quirks, my boy?”

And it’s then that Izuku realizes he skipped a step here.

He’d told Oboro what he’d figured out about the vestiges and the Quirks, not All Might.

“O-oh,” the teen wheezes out hurriedly, “um, right, I... think I’m going to be manifesting all of the vestiges Quirks? Do you... remember when I told you I saw the, um, vestiges a while back?”

All Might frowns to himself, before nodding slowly, “yes, I remember you talking about that after the Sports Festival. Have you had any other interactions with them since? You never mentioned anything.”

“W-well,” Izuku continues nervously, “I... today, I met one of them.

He spoke to me. A-after Shinsou-kun used his Quirk on me, I met one of the past users. Banjo-san. H-he told me about his Quirk, it, um, it's called Blackwhip; that's the Quirk I manifested today."

"Banjo-san?" All Might's brow furrows, "I... don't believe I've heard the name before. Nor have a I heard, or seen, anything quite like that new Quirk. Besides my own mentor, and mentions of the wielder to pass the Quirk onto her, I truthfully don't know much about the past holders."

Izuku offers a sheepish shrug, "besides First, the, um, the first wielder of One for All, he's the only vestige I've really met, b-but, um, that wasn't what— an-um-anyways, Banjo-san told me about Blackwhip and he... he also said that I'll be... manifesting more Quirks too and I... I do what I did with One for All all over again, Yagi-san. Blackwhip could hurt people— it almost *did* today because I didn't know what I was doing. I can't do the again, let alone each time they give me another new Quirk."

Izuku's jaw snaps shut as he glares down at his own lap.

He'd come so close to hurting students today— Monoma, and Uraraka, and *Hitoshi*— and he doesn't blame the vestiges for giving him a new Quirk (though a bit of warning would've been nice) but he can't just run wild trying to learn this new, potentially dangerous Quirk by himself.

He'd been there before and it just didn't quite work, and he doubts it'll work again when there's easier, more logical routes they can be taking. Other who have the power and knowledge to help them—help Izuku so he's not breaking every bone in his body or hurting others with something he doesn't know how to control.

He simply can't learn any other Quirks the way he'd learned One for All.

Not if there's a chance Blackwhip could hurt others— One for All was mostly dangerous for Izuku himself, which he accepted when taking that piece of hair from All Might, but he refuses to let his new Quirks hurt the people he cares about.

His next words are quiet, just for All Might to hear, "I need *real* help, Yagi-san. I need professional counselling, and professional training. I have help at my fingertips just being at this school, being in Aizawa-Sensei's class, but I..." Izuku bites hard at the inside of his cheek before looking up at his mentor defiantly, "I'm at this school for a

reason. For help, and to learn, but they can't help me if they don't know why I'm struggling..."

Yagi-san is quiet again, staring at Izuku with a thoughtful expression.

There's a bit of hesitance, but Izuku is more surprised to see the bright understanding in the man's eyes. Hope blooms in Izuku's chest at the sight.

He's too close to let this blow over now.

"My boy," the retired Pro starts slowly, "I think... I agree with you."

"I know you said it was a secret," Izuku bulldozes on, hardly aware of what the man had said. "I know it's confidential, and that we can't tell just *anyone*, but you had people in your corner, like Gran Torino and the detective and you still had your *mentor* too for a while, I just think —" Izuku's thoughts come to a screeching halt as All Might's words finally register. "W-wait, you— ...what? R-really...?"

"Unexpected development," Oboro mutters under his breath, watching the Pro skeptically.

"Really," the man smiles softly, "I do agree with you."

"Oh," Izuku frowns, looking down at his lap as the need to fight drains from his chest, "you, um, didn't. Before, I mean. After the USJ, when we talked then. You didn't mind that I told Shota about how recently I got the Quirk, but you didn't want me to tell him anything else..."

"Yes, well, that was before One for All started acting out and making a mess of things," Yagi-san sighs, running his fingers though his hair stressfully. "I've never heard of One for All being anything other than the energy stockpiling Quirk that's been passed down. I'd hardly even seen the vestiges in all the years I possessed the Quirk.

"I was scared for you when that new Quirk manifested so suddenly," the man admits quietly. "I don't understand what's happening, and frankly... to know you're going to be getting even more Quirks? Quirks I've never seen, let alone heard of? I'm out of my depth, my boy."

Izuku takes a moment to process his Hero's words.

The man hesitates, studies Izuku before shaking his head, "I was prepared to teach you One for All, but this... I can't teach what I don't

know. That, I don't know how to do. Not like a trained professional would. You do need a Quirk counsellor at this point, and you need training that will veer from what I know how to teach."

"You're... okay with telling someone else?" Izuku breathes out, heart pounding in his chest.

He'd started this conversation believing they'd be fighting about this, that Izuku would have to go behind All Might's back, blatantly disobeying him in order to get some help, but he hadn't expected All Might to agree with him. He hadn't expected All Might to be on the same page.

"Not just anyone," the Pro huffs a soft laugh, "but I think Aizawa is a good one to tell, and... truthfully, I think he already suspects something. I know he's greatly aided you since finding out about your new Quirk, and I have hopes he'll be able to keep helping you as you manifest more Quirks. Just remember I'll always help you to the best of my abilities as well. You're still my successor, and I'll do everything in my power to help you with the power I handed you."

"Thank you," Izuku can't help but say.

For the first time since inheriting One for All, Izuku doesn't feel like he's drowning under it.

All Might is offering him help— outside help.

A chance to grow, and expand, and to have someone who isn't either of them looking at the facts and seeing what they aren't. All Might can only teach him based on his own experience, and that helps too, Izuku is sure he'd be completely lost without All Might's wisdom, but learning from someone who's never possessed the Quirk might be just what they need here as new Quirks manifest and One for All grows stronger.

Izuku had learned loads from Gran Torino before the Stain incident.

He doesn't doubt that Shota and Hizashi may be able to broaden his understanding as well when they finally understand his Quirk fully, or, as well as anyone can understand a haunted, age-old transferrable Quirk.

"You must remember though," Yagi-san reminds seriously, "that this is still a confidential secret. You trust Aizawa, and I do as well— I trust both you and Aizawa— but this secret cannot get out. You, and

everyone who knows will be in grave danger—”

“And just what the hell kind of *gravely dangerous* secret have you told *my* kid, Yagi?”

Izuku startles abruptly, attention shooting to the doorway where Shota is glaring daggers at the former Number One Hero. Izuku’s heart plummets to his stomach as he feels Yagi-san tense up beside him.

Izuku had been hoping to... ease his guardian into this a bit more.

Looks like that’s a no-go.

“Ah, Aizawa-san!” Yagi-san turns sheepishly to face the underground Hero. “How... uh, how long have you been there?”

“Long enough,” the man snaps heatedly, marching into the room and putting himself between the bed, and the chair where All Might sits like a scolded child. “I think the three of us need to have a *talk*.”

Shota is *pissed*.

Izuku can see that. He's sure *everyone* can see that.

It takes Izuku and All Might both pleading to the man in an attempt to get Shota to agree to postponing this *talk* until Recovery Girl discharges Izuku from the infirmary a couple hours later and they can move to a more secured location to talk.

Shota ends up caving, but that doesn’t mean he drops the firm scowl curling his expression, and the worryingly passive aggressive silent treatment a scolded teenager and former Number One Hero receive until they’re tucked away in a sound-proof conference room.

Izuku finds himself almost curled into Shota’s side with a clear view of a scolded Yagi-san sitting just across from them. Izuku isn’t sure if this is a tactic to shame All Might, or if Shota just really doesn’t trust the man with Izuku after what he’d heard them talking about.

And alright, it hadn’t sounded good.

Izuku will admit that, but it also isn’t as bad as it had sounded.

Right?

Still, Izuku can practically feel the anger and irritation, and what

Izuku thinks might even be worry coming off of Shota in waves as they all settle in for what's bound to be a long, uncomfortable chat. Izuku really is not prepared for this.

At least he has comfort in the form of a ghost perched on the arm rest at his side. It's nice to never feel alone, and Oboro usually knows what to say to calm Izuku down. He adds commentary, and his own opinion, which doesn't always coincide with Izuku's but he appreciates it all the same— especially when Izuku can pretend he never said anything at all when it contradicts his own opinion, and no one besides the ghost himself is none the wiser.

He's hyper aware of how much distance away the ghost is, not wanting to accidentally touch Oboro or something and has to explain that as well.

One for All is more than enough for now.

The only small mercy to this meeting right now is the fact that All Might is just facing Shota— which, well, may not appear to be a mercy when staring into dark, angry narrowed eyes, but it is when you consider the fact All Might could have two angry, protective teacher guardians laying into him.

Shota is definitely scary, Izuku won't argue that, but having Shota *and* Hizashi in the room right now, learning about One for All at the same time? Izuku doesn't think All Might would've ever recovered from that. Izuku has seen just how protective each guardian can be, and after hearing about something like One for All, which, alright, Izuku knows it doesn't look *good*, exactly, but he also knows there's really not much they can do about it at this point.

He's not going to give up One for All.

Well, unless All Might explicitly asks for the Quirk back, which would completely break Izuku's heart, but he'd do as was asked. Izuku doesn't think All Might would ever do that to him, especially not now that the vestiges are making themselves known and finally helping him towards reaching the Quirk's full potential.

Still, he doesn't even want to think about that happening.

"Well?" Shota snaps impatiently, looking between Izuku, who's almost pressed into his side and Yagi, who sits across from them, almost sheepishly. Izuku can't help but notice the daggers Shota is glaring in All Might's direction, while he himself only gets sideways, uncertain

glances from his guardian.

Izuku can't tell if it's because he's still slightly fevered from the Quirk Exhaustion, or if it's a similar situation to before the Sports Festival when Shota and Hizashi had jumped to conclusions about Izuku's relationship with the Number One Pro, where he thinks All Might's done something against Izuku's will or something.

But, once again, it is nothing like that, and Izuku won't have Yagi taking the heat for something like that when he's trying his best just as Izuku is trying to.

Despite how Shota's eyes are narrowed on Yagi, Izuku is the one to clear his throat. "You... um, you wanted to know about what happened today, didn't you?"

"That new Quirk to manifested in the middle of a training exercise?" Shota snaps his attention from Yagi and down to Izuku thoughtfully, "yes, I did. I do. Are you saying this, whatever the hell this is, has something to do with that?"

Izuku swallows, nodding meekly.

"Aizawa," Yagi starts awkwardly, "do you remember that villain I arrested? Right after young Midoriya and young Bakugou were kidnapped by the League, when I lost my Quirk?"

Shota eyes Yagi skeptically before ducking his chin in a nod, "I'm familiar. What does that asshole have to do with this? With my kid?"

Izuku sees Yagi shift uncertainly, eyes flicking to Izuku before returning to Shota, "I suppose I should start from the beginning."

"Yeah," Shota huffs out, arms lacing over his chest, "you should."

"Back at the dawn of Quirks, there were two brothers."

"Oh, God," Shota sucks in a tired breath, slumping back into the couch, "I walked into that one, didn't I? Go on then, back at the dawn of time?"

The former Number One Hero frowns at Shota for interrupting him, before clearing his throat, "one brother, the elder, was blessed with a powerful Quirk— able to give and take others Quirks at will— while the other, the younger brother, was thought to be Quirkless."

Yagi blinks to himself before shaking his head, “I’ll save you the bulk of the details, most are unimportant, but that older brother is known as All for One, a villain who’s been dominating the villain world for hundreds of years. I fought him once; he almost killed me and I... I thought he was dead, but he wasn’t. He’s still at large, Aizawa, and he’s dangerous.”

“You mean to tell me there’s a *dinosaur* of a villain running around stealing Quirks?” The dark-haired man balks suddenly, drawing in a shaky breath, “you mentioned the League. He... he had my students— my kid. My nephew talked to him, Yagi, Hitoshi used his Quirk on him. Why the hell didn’t you tell us?”

“I thought he was dead,” Yagi swallows guiltily. “He should be dead. I don’t know how he survived...”

“Okay, forget about the older brother who should be dead for a second, what about the younger brother? The Quirkless one?” Shota pauses, glancing up to the ceiling as if he can’t believe he’s having this conversation, “you wouldn’t have started this off talking about both of them if he wasn’t vital to this story too. And what the hell does any of this have to do with Izuku?”

“The younger brother...” Yagi leans forwards, hanging his hands between his knees, “I suppose it does start with him. He was said to be Quirkless. He was a weak, sickly man from the stories I was told by my mentor, but he was said to have had a strong sense of justice. He was forced to watch his brother commit vile atrocities, taking and giving Quirks at will. There was nothing he could do— All for One was a mighty villain, and he was a weak young man.”

“You said he was *said* to have been Quirkless?” As Izuku expected, Shota narrowed right in on the most important detail. “Was he not Quirkless?”

“He was not,” Yagi shakes his head. “The younger brother had a dormant transferrable Quirk that had no other use other than to transfer to someone else. This was way before the pinky-toe joint theory was discovered, so you really couldn’t know back then. He didn’t have a visible Quirk, so it was assumed he was Quirkless.”

“Okay,” Shota drawls, looking between Izuku and Yagi again, “what happens next? Still not seeing how this involves my kid.”

“All for One, he... he forced a Quirk onto his brother against his will. An energy stockpiling Quirk, one that his weak body could handle.

That stockpiling Quirk merged with the dormant transference Quirk already within the younger brother, and became what we now know it to be today, a Quirk called One for All."

"One for All?" Shota repeats, mouth twisting downwards like he'd bitten a slice of lemon.

It's weird to hear Shota say the Quirk's name after Izuku had worked so hard to keep it a secret.

"Yes," Yagi bows his head in a nod. "It... It's a Quirk passed down from user to user. I inherited it from my mentor, and she from her own, down a long line that stemmed with All for One's younger brother. He hoped, that by passing the Quirk on, that someday it would be strong enough to take down his brother. All for One's goal is to take the Quirk back and destroy it. If he manages... we won't stand a chance against him and Shigaraki. He's threatened by it."

"Let me get this straight," Shota rubs hard at his eyes, "there's an A-tier villain running around that we didn't even know existed because you thought he was dead, you have a Quirk that has been passed down— which, by the way, sounds insane, Yagi— for over two hundred years and this all somehow involves my foster kid?"

"Had."

"What?" Shota's eyes narrow sharply on the retired Pro, who manages to keep eye contact.

"I *had* a Quirk that was passed down for over two hundred years. Past tense. Had."

"No," Shota stares hard at Yagi through slivered eyes, "no, *please* don't tell me you—"

"I'm the ninth wielder," Izuku admits without glancing up. He nervously rubs his palms up and down the fabric of his uniform pants to ease the anxiety swirling in his chest. "Yagi-san passed One for All down to me the day of the entrance exam. I... I have the Quirk now. Please don't be mad."

His guardian is quiet for a long second.

The tension in the room is thick, heavy enough that it could be cut with a knife. Izuku almost feels like he can't breathe, but he manages his way through the lingering tension.

“You didn’t randomly manifest a Quirk,” Shota swallows shakily, covering his mouth like he’s trying to hide his unease, “you were given one. This is why you hovered over him, isn’t it, Yagi? Watching over your protégé? We always thought you had a weird fascination with Izuku but this... this is worse, Yagi.”

Izuku’s heart leaps into his throat, “Shota—”

“You gave a kid a Quirk that an A-tier villain is after.” Shota continues as if he hadn’t even heard Izuku. Izuku doesn’t even think he had past his own anger. “You painted a target on a child’s back by giving him that Quirk, and you didn’t even have the gall to inform me. How was I supposed to keep him safe when I didn’t know? How was I supposed to keep any of them safe when Izuku was a target and they’d get caught in the cross fire?”

“Aizawa—”

“No,” Shota snaps, hands slamming on the coffee table between them as he stands threateningly, leaning close to Yagi, “we were attacked barely a week into school. They wanted you— your weird Quirk. My kid was held hostage in a mall by Shigaraki. Two of my students were kidnapped from a summer camp, after they attacked everyone. These weren’t random events, Yagi, they’re targeted and you never once thought to inform us.”

“You don’t understand the gravity of this secret, Aizawa—”

“*I* don’t understand?” Shota snarls.

“Here we go,” Oboro chimes from Izuku’s side, chin perched in his palm as he glances between All Might and Shota like a riveting game of badminton or tennis.

“*You* don’t understand. How dense do you have to be to think what you did was right?” Yagi recoils like Shota had physically hit him. “What do you tell yourself at night to make this sound even remotely alright?”

Izuku scans his guardian nervously and decides that that very well may actually happen if things don’t get turned around soon.

Shota is positively fuming, “this teaching thing isn’t a game, Yagi. Secrecy might’ve worked for you over the years, but it sure as hell doesn’t work now. It’s not just *you* anymore— not here. Not at this *school*. You've put these kids at risk. You’ve put us teachers at risk.

You put Izuku at risk. You've put this whole entire school at risk, and you didn't even bother mentioning it. You watched us struggle, time and time again. We could've had plans, we could've been prepared to protect these kids, but instead you kept this from us, from me, and because of that, every single time we've encountered the League, we're unprepared and caught off guard."

"It's not like that, Aizawa," Yagi grimaces, "you don't understand. The more people who know, the more people are in danger. I couldn't put you, or the rest of the staff in danger like that. All for One is dangerous, and none of you are equipped to handle him. And I certainly couldn't put the students in that kind of danger. This is confidential!"

"You told a fifteen-year-old student," Shota barks back, "tell me how it makes sense to tell a minor, a child, but not a group of highly capable Hero teachers? We know secrets. We know confidentiality. We know villains. We're more prepared to handle a dangerous villain than a child is, Yagi. We could've helped you. Helped *him*. Where is your logic in that?"

"You don't understand," the Pro stresses back.

"I've seen All for One kill people without remorse. My mentor... she..." Yagi's voice gets misty and he looks away sharply before returning his attention to Shota, "you don't understand how dangerous he is. Your Quirks are useless when they're stripped away— when they're *stolen* from you. He can't take One for All. It can only be given, and taken by willing participants. Young Midoriya agreed to this, long before you even knew the boy, Aizawa."

"That doesn't make it right!" Shota almost sounds hysteric.

"It doesn't," Yagi holds his hands up placatingly, tone somber, "but what's done is done. I didn't know the League was working with All for One— I truly did think he was dead. I was just as surprised as you, and I hate knowing that it's me and One for All they're after, that I inadvertently put everyone in danger. I can't change that, but I can help young Midoriya be the best Hero he can be. I can help him master these Quirks so he'd prepared for the worst."

"Quirks?" Shota's voice comes out deathly level. "Plural? More than this-this stockpiling transferring Quirk? What the hell kind of jacked-up Quirk did you give him?"

"Um," Izuku chimes in awkwardly, hardly caving in on himself when

Shota's attention snaps in his direction, "I manifested another one today... you saw it, Shota. It's called Blackwhip and it... it's different from One for All?"

Shota glares hard at Yagi, but the retired Pro just lifts his hands in surrender, "this is new to me too, trust me, Aizawa. I'd never heard of anything like this happening, the boy truly is remarkable."

"And how many more of these Quirks are you going to be getting?"

"Just five more," Izuku shrugs.

"*Just five*, he says like he's talking about the weather and not manifesting six more Quirks than any normal human being gets," Oboro groans from his side. "You, my oblivious friend, are going to give that man a heart attack one of these days."

Izuku blinks in surprise at hearing the ghost, before turning sharply to his guardian, where he instantly feels guilty.

Alright, maybe he should've eased in a little, as the colour has drained completely from Shota's face.

"You're going to have *seven* Quirks?" Shota wheezes out finally, turning fully to look wide-eyed at Izuku. He scans the boy quickly, a frown tugging at his lips, "what will that do to your temperature?"

"His temperature?" All Might questions in confusion, brow furrowing as Izuku tenses up.

"The hypothermic state he goes into when he uses your Quirk, ring a bell?"

"What?" Yagi balks, whipping around to face Izuku, "young Midoriya what does he mean? One for All shouldn't... it's been doing that to you...? Why didn't you tell me?"

Izuku swears his heart is pounding in his ears as his lies finally catch up to him. He tries to swallow it down, but all he hears is static and the rapid thumping of his heart beat. "I-I—"

"You didn't know?" Shota turns back to Yagi, cautiously blank as he eyes the man, "he almost died after the week long internships. Your Quirk apparently drains his internal temperature. If Todoroki hadn't of been there that night, he would've..." Shota swallows, before shaking his head like he's chasing away the thought. "We made changes to his

costume and haven't had an incident since, but yeah, it almost killed him."

"I didn't know," Yagi breathes out. "I'm sorry, One for All is different for each wielder. The whole idea of the Quirk is that the first person cultivates the power, and then passes it on to another. The next refines it and passes it along again. Young Midoriya is the ninth wielder. It's constantly getting stronger and I... I had no idea. I didn't know about the additional Quirks, or the vestiges either."

Izuku feels awful. He feels fake. He feels like the scum of the universe right now. He'd lied and now it was coming back to bite him in the ass. He hadn't lied to All Might, not really, but he also did.

He's the worst.

"What vestiges?"

Izuku winces, drawing in a shaky breath, "the past users," he allows hesitantly. Oboro has perked up at his side, but this is certainly not the time to be spilling all his secrets. Shota is already mad enough about the one. "They've been... reaching out, I guess. They're sorta trapped in the Quirk. I've spoke to the First user, All for One's brother, and... and the owner of Blackwhip, but the others... I've just sorta seen them. I-in the, um, in One for All, and uh, and in dreams, I think."

"When?"

"When 'toshi used his Quirk on me today? And... um, and last night. I thought it was just a bad dream, but now... I don't know. It felt pretty real, the more that I actually think about it. I did see First— I'd seen him before that dream, after I, uh, while I was in the hospital after Hosu..."

"And you didn't even mention this to All Might? You didn't tell *any* adult?"

"I wasn't sure how to," Izuku offers weakly. "I mentioned them after the Sports Festival, but he didn't know either so I just... I don't know, didn't say anything? It wasn't a big deal, or anything, they weren't bad, just... strange?"

"Young Midoriya," Yagi-san chides softly, "you could've told me."

"I-I know," Izuku bobs his head in a nod, "but I didn't even know what was going on and, it didn't really make much sense, I mean, First

didn't wasn't making much sense, at least, and then everything just happened so suddenly and... and I'm sorry."

"Everyone could've handled this better," Shota huffs tiredly. "Let's just... let bygones be bygones. Lay everything out on the table, so this doesn't happen again."

"That's a good idea," Yagi nods slowly in agreement.

"Yeah," Izuku bites his lip, "sounds good."

Shota nods again, but for a second, he doesn't move.

His eyes are screwed shut, and he'd clenching them tight enough that Izuku wonders if he's trying to ward off a headache. The man sighs deeply, finally blinking his eyes open as he glances sideways at Izuku.

"This is just a lot to process," Shota finally admits to them, shoulders slumping down. He doesn't look as angry anymore, now he really does just look like he's just trying to process everything, "first I want to know who else knows about all of this?"

"Kacchan," Izuku admits sheepishly, ignoring the pointed look his guardian sends him. "Sorta. I'm not sure if he really believed me, but I did tell him. And... um, you now? That's everyone who knows because of me, at least."

"Detective Tsukauchi knows," All Might adds, just as sheepish. "A retired Pro by the name of Gran Torino, he mentored me after my mentor no longer could. You would've seen his name on young Midoriya's internship paperwork. Nezu and Recovery Girl both know, and... well, Sasaki knew as well. That's about it, I believe."

"Wonderful, a list," Shota sighs, rubbing at his eyes before he glares up at the ceiling, "I will be telling Hizashi, just so you're aware. Maybe not everything we discussed, but the important details. We are Izuku's guardians, and we need to be prepared to keep him safe. That's non-negotiable. He's my husband, and that kid is our son. I accept the dangers of knowing, and I know he will too if it means keeping Izuku safe."

Yagi swallows nervously, but bows his head in a nod, "I understand. But please, keep it between the two of you. I cannot caution enough as to how important it is that this be kept a secret. We don't know for certain that they know I've passed on the Quirk. For young Midoriya's safety we need this to stay confidential."

“You’re barking up the wrong tree with that warning,” Shota huffs, almost amused, “the majority of the population doesn’t even know Hizashi and I are married, let alone that either of us aren’t even single. You didn’t know until we told you. Trust me, Yagi, the two of us are more than capable of keeping a secret, especially when it comes to the safety of our kid.”

“Ah,” the Pro hums bashfully, “that’s right.”

“So… how exactly did the two of you meet?” Shota’s narrowed eyes dart between the two of them, “at what point did you decide to pass a highly dangerous Quirk onto a fifteen-year-old?”

“I, ah, was actually fourteen when we met?”

“Fourteen?” Shota’s voice is too calm to actually be calm, and Izuku feels the man’s frame tensing angrily. Izuku curls into himself a little more, wincing as Shota glares hard at Yagi.

“But! But, I didn’t pass the Quirk on until he was fifteen!” Yagi hurriedly adds, wincing at his own words. “Young Midoriya simply was not ready to handle the Quirk when we met. I put him through extensive training to build the muscle mass he needed to safely contain my Quirk. It’s powerful, and he simply did not have the muscle density that One for All would need. Frankly…”

All Might hesitates, looking away sheepishly, “had I passed it on when we met, it would’ve blown his limbs off completely or… or possibly even killed him. I waited as long as I could, Aizawa-san, but you know just as well as I do that young Midoriya would not have passed the physical portion of the entrance exam without a Quirk. I knew his best shot at prevailing with One for All would be at this school— he needed to get in.”

“Probably the only smart decision I’ve heard you make yet,” Shota drawls drily, jaw clenched tightly.

Izuku can’t help but grimace at what Yagi said; it really doesn’t sound that much better.

Fifteen is still pretty young to be getting a Quirk like One for All, but it is better than fourteen. Almost a whole year later, ten full months of Izuku following a nutritional meal plan to get his calories up, and doing hours upon hours of physical labor to bulk himself up.

Izuku is sure he would’ve died by now if Yagi-san had passed the

Quirk on any earlier than he had.

At least they'd been self-aware enough to realize Izuku wouldn't have been able to manage alone with just Yagi alone— attending this school had been more influential to his growth than either of them would care to admit.

Izuku doubts he'd be where he is now if he'd never gotten into Yuuei.

"All Might trained me hard," Izuku offers quietly, "we did the best we could. I had ten months between the time we met, and the entrance exam to build but the muscle density I would need to inherit the Quirk. I knew what I was getting into, f-for, um, for the most part, at least. These new Quirks are a surprise. I just... I wanted a Quirk. So bad. I wanted One for All— I wanted a chance to help people. I wanted to be normal, and to be a Hero, Shota. I'm just as much to blame as Yagi-san is."

"Okay," Shota breathes out between clenched teeth after drawing in a calming breath, "so you met him when he was fourteen. How? How did a fourteen-year-old junior high student catch the Number One Hero's attention?"

Izuku clamps down on his own tongue, looking away sheepishly, not wanting to be the one to answer, and Yagi clears his throat nervously, looking just as much like he doesn't want to answer.

Izuku sees the man anxiously wringing his hands together, "well... I happened across young Midoriya who was being attacked by a villain I happened to be in pursuit of—"

"Hang on, *what?*" Shota seethes, attention jerking down to Izuku in shock before looking back at Yagi as his eyes harden, "there were no flags on his file. No incident reports. No police reports. This is news to me, Yagi. What the hell do you mean he was attacked by a villain when he was fourteen?"

"It was a sludge villain," Izuku swallows, remembering the feeling of his oxygen being cut off and slime forcing its way down his throat, "he... he said he needed a vessel and then he just sorta... tried to take over my body? It felt like I was drowning in goo, and I just, I couldn't breathe, and then— I... w-well, then next thing I realized All Might was there, and the villain was caught and... and everything was fine."

Izuku chances a glance at Oboro, who's perched on the arm rest, grimacing.

That look alone has Izuku swallowing nervously, anxiously reevaluating that afternoon like he'd missed something important as he stares down, almost unseeing, at his hands, voice small, "it was fine ...right?"

There's a second of tense silence, until Shota is the one to break it.

"Why wasn't there a report filed of any attack involving him, Yagi?"

Izuku looks up at Shota's icy tone, glancing sideways at his guardian, who's pays Izuku no mind at that moment, eyes narrowed dangerously on Yagi-san.

The former Number One Hero wilts guiltily, eyes shifting away from Shota as he worries his bottom lip between his teeth, obviously trying to figure out how to explain that specific attack without having the Underground Pro lashing out.

"Did you even report it? To anyone? Did you have him looked at by medics on scene? ...was there even any medics on scene? Did you report *anything*? Tell *anyone*? The kid was drowning, Yagi, he was being suffocated. He could've *died*."

"I was fine," Izuku whispers.

"But there was no guarantee that you were fine," Shota turns sharply to look at Izuku, anger softening, "you *felt* fine, but that doesn't mean you were. It's protocol to have people involved in attacks looked over by medics. You could've been dry drowning, there could've been bacterial fluid in your lungs, or you could've even had asphyxiation complications that didn't present instantly. Symptoms aren't always instant, Izuku— your body was functioning on adrenaline at the time of the attack. A self-assessment isn't enough after an attack like that, it's up to the adult, or first responder to make the right decisions."

Izuku sinks back into the couch, staring hard at his own hands.

"Medical attention is always your first response— for anyone involved in attack like that. Whether that be civilians, or yourself while you're out doing Hero work. That's something every *Hero* should know." Shota's gaze snaps back to the other Pro, the softness bleeding out to a stern hardness once more, "so why the hell didn't you report a fourteen-year-old kid almost drowning to death by the villain you were obviously already after?"

"It slipped my mind, Aizawa."

Izuku winces once more as Shota's tension doubles, attention laser focused on the other Pro.

Izuku can almost feel Shota vibrating with anger.

Yagi reaches up to card his fingers through his hair stressfully, "I never made it to the police station after that specific attack. I got distracted, and the villain... he escaped my custody. My priority was getting him off the streets so he couldn't hurt anyone else, but, well, I let myself forget about him for just a moment and he was gone. I didn't have a chance to give a statement, or file a report because I never made it to the station with the villain."

"And how the hell did you lose a villain, huh?"

"I distracted him," Izuku doesn't look up from his lap as he takes the blame, even when he feels his guardian and his mentor's attention snap towards him. "Yagi-san tried to leave; told me he was bringing the villain to the police station but I... I was an idiot and I had a question for All Might and I... I grabbed onto him and then he had to make sure I was safe somewhere and I—" Izuku sucks in a breath, shaking his head. "I got in the way, and then All Might couldn't really leave. It really was my fault."

"Izuku knew about your limit before anyone else," Shota is looking at Yagi again, "you hit your limit that day, didn't you?"

"I did," the man offers a tiny, sheepish smile. "I managed to get us both onto flat ground, but I just couldn't hold onto my form any longer— I'd already known my limit was fast approaching when I found Midoriya and the villain, and then I realized he was clinging onto my leg when I left. I wouldn't have shown him if I could've helped it."

"It was very surprising," Izuku adds with a light shrug. He turns to look at Shota with wide, serious eyes, "he went from *All Might* to *Small Might*. I could hardly believe my eyes, Shota."

"I suppose I did," the man laughs quietly. "After that incident I was much more careful with my limit."

"We're getting off track," Shota's narrowed gaze flicks between the two of them, "you recklessly clung onto a flying man's leg, and you exposed your sensitive secret to a minor, what next?"

"We talked," Izuku bites the inside of his cheek.

Shota looks between the two of them again, frown deepening thoughtfully until, “about what?”

Izuku glances at Yagi, only to see the man looking sadly at him.

Izuku opens his mouth to brush it off, they don’t have to tell Shota, but Yagi beats him to it.

“He asked me if someone who was Quirkless could be a Hero. And I...”

Shota had quickly tensed at Izuku’s side, narrowed glare watching Yagi intently, “and you said...?”

“I told him the truth,” Yagi admits quietly. “Heroics is dangerous, Aizawa. I had this powerful, one-of-a-kind Quirk, and I still got critically injured. I almost died with a Quirk. I couldn’t send a Quirkless young man into a world of ruthless villains when he has no means to protect himself.”

“You said *no?*”

Izuku’s never heard his guardian’s voice curl so dangerously venomous.

“You said something similar, Aizawa,” Yagi shakes his head, lips drawn downwards in a frown, “that first day, after your Quirk apprehension test. There’s nothing crueler than letting a dream end midway—”

“I said that to *you*, not to a student,” Shota snaps heatedly. “I give them a chance to prove themselves before I expel them— you can’t gage someone’s potential without seeing what they’re capable of, Yagi. Midoriya proved himself to me. It is cruel, I wasn’t wrong, but it’s even *crueler* to flat out deny them before they've even had a shot at it. What did you do after you stomped on his dreams?”

“I...” Yagi hesitates, and Izuku is silently pleading to the man to not actually tell Shota what happened next. His pleading goes unanswered. “I had to bring the villain to the police station. We were finished talking, so I left. I had to walk the villain down to the station, the bottle wasn’t going to contain him long.”

“Ouch,” Oboro grimaces, shaking his head sympathetically, “wrong move, Number One.”

“You left?” Shota snarls dangerously, “you left *my* Quirkless child on

the rooftop of tall building after you, *his* Hero, told him he *couldn't* be a Hero?"

Izuku sees Shota's hand clenching at the loops of his capture weapon like it's taking his entire will not to snap and wrap the retired Pro in it, to not draw it suffocatingly tight. Izuku's never seen Shota look at anyone besides villains the way he's looking at All Might right now. The man's eyes glow faintly, his hair slowly rises and All Might—

All Might genuinely looks scared, inching back into the backrest of the couch like a cornered animal, where Shota looks seconds away from jumping him—

"Shota!" Izuku calls sharply without a thought, grabbing at Shota's wrist in an attempt to force his attention onto Izuku and away from his target, "stop, please. He only told me the truth. He was right. There was just... no way I could've become a Hero without a Quirk, and we both know it. We all know it. I couldn't have even... I never would've made it into the Hero course without his help. Without his *Quirk*."

Izuku shakes his head, letting go of Shota's wrist when it finally goes limp in his hand.

He doesn't want to look at his guardian; doesn't want to see anger, or disappointment, so he keeps his gaze carefully trained on his lap.

He sucks in a breath as he lets his hands drop back into his lap, offering a light laugh that holds no humor, "you watched Hitoshi struggle to get into our class, and he has a Quirk. You struggled to be taken seriously. I didn't stand a chance against that. Deep down, I knew I never would've made it into this school Quirkless, and All Might told me as much. I respected the honesty, honestly."

Shota is quiet for a long second, and then his hand creeps into Izuku's field of vision, settling gently on his knee. The faint grip he squeezes is gentle, and surprisingly comforting for the conversation they're currently having.

It's nice to feel, especially since Izuku is sure Shota wouldn't be offering comfort like that if he was upset with him. It's a weight off his shoulders to know Shota isn't truly upset with him over One for All, and keeping this a secret way past when they became teacher and student, and even past when they became foster parent and foster son.

Izuku had been so worried that this might drive that wedge between

them that he'd been fearing since his teachers had taken him on as a foster child. He knew he was supposed to be honest with the men, but it was so hard.

It was so hard giving people all the facts and watching them decide whether they wanted to stay or go— people never wanted to stay.

He always found himself alone in the end.

Izuku sniffles, blinking away tears, before looking up at his guardian with a wobbly smile.

Shota's lips are curled just faintly in a calming smile, but his eyes are stressed, "if he left you up there that day, how did he decide you were worthy to inherit this One for All thing?"

"When he proved that he had exactly what it takes to be a Hero," All Might is the one who answers, voice serious and leaving no room for argument. "You know as well as I do that young Midoriya has the heart and soul of a Hero. I made the mistake of judging a book by its cover, but when I got a glimpse of what was hidden inside, I knew there wasn't a better young man to fill my shoes when the time comes."

Shota's brow furrows as he lazily narrows his eyes, "that doesn't really answer my question, Yagi. You left him there, so how did he prove himself to you?"

"Ah, r-right," the Pro's jaw snaps shut sheepishly as he rubs nervously at the back of his neck, "the villain I was chasing, he did escape in the confusion and unfortunately, young Midoriya was not his only target that day."

Shota stares hard at All Might for a long second, before his attention settles on Izuku, who clears his throat nervously. Izuku's stomach flips anxiously when he feels Shota's prying gaze on him, but he knows he needs to be the one to really explain what happened next.

"Explain," the dark-haired man demands quietly, waiting for either of them to continue.

"You... um, you're not going to like this next part very much," Izuku wrings his hands together, finally forcing his eyes up to meet Shota's. "I was going home when I saw the commotions. It was an attack. And... not just that, but it was the villain who'd attacked me, attacking someone else."

Izuku's hands clench into fists in his lap as he squeezes his eyes shut at the vivid memory of Kacchan being choked by slime. He distantly sees the Heroes standing by, *watching* and doing nothing because no one had a Quirk suitable for such a villain, and he sees Kacchan *struggling* aimlessly to breathe and guilt drops like a rock in his stomach.

Shota shifts beside him, moving too quickly for Izuku's panicking brain to keep up, and then the man is gently easing Izuku's fists open — pain blossoms across his palms as blood rushes into the pinprick indents from his nails.

When his eyes snap open, Shota is crouched before him— he can't see All Might anymore, or really anything else besides his guardian, which makes it easier to focus on Shota entirely— still holding his hands gently as his thumbs sweep calmingly over his knuckles.

The contact drags Izuku back from his spiraling, and he can't help but clamp down on Shota's hands.

The man doesn't so much as bat an eyelash.

"Focus on me, Kiddo," Shota tells him with all that gentleness Izuku had come to associate his hard-ass teacher with over the time he'd gotten to know Shota on a personal level, "you're not in trouble, just tell me what really happened, alright?"

"It was Kacchan," Izuku croaks out, shifting to drag his cheek along his shoulder to soak up the tears spilling. "It was Kacchan he was trying to use, and no one was— the Heroes were all *watching* him d-die. I-I couldn't just—" Izuku sucks in a shaky breath, eyes squeezing shut once again, "I could let him die, Dad, I couldn't. He's my friend— he was my best friend. He-he's *Kacchan*, and he was dying, and no one was h-helping—"

"Take a breath, Sunshine," Izuku hears distantly, and his first thought, as silly as it is, is to think back to if he's ever heard Shota use the nickname Hizashi had dubbed him with— maybe in sign once or twice after Hizashi had made his sign-name the sign for sunshine and the letter 'I', but besides that? Izuku doesn't remember it.

Something about hearing the nickname, after all of this— his secret coming to light, and Shota knowing about something he'd tried so hard to keep hidden, has Izuku crumbling at how softly Shota says it.

He tries to draw in a stuttery breath like directed, lungs suddenly aching at the lack of oxygen, but he just ends up choking on it. He

draws in a panic breath through his nose, shaking his head vigorously.

“Yes, you can,” Shota urges gently, one of his hands coming up to cup the back of Izuku’s head, fingers carding though the curls, “focus on breathing. In and out. Just keep trying, okay? It’s just us. There’s nothing to be scared of. You’re okay, Katsuki is okay. I know you’re overwhelmed, but you’re okay, Izuku.”

Izuku struggles for a moment longer, before he finally manages to draw in a shaky breath that eases the strain in his lungs. He sucks in another shortly after, deep and desperate that has relief balming over the ache in his lungs.

“S-sorry,” Izuku croaks out finally, bowing his head forwards until his forehead just faintly settles against Shota’s sternum. There’s something about feeling his guardian breathe that continues to calm him down. Makes it easier to suck in oxygen and let himself slump tiredly.

Shota’s chin bows down in return, settling on the crown of Izuku’s head for just a second before pulling away as he gently nudges Izuku back. Izuku clings for a second longer, eyes squeezed shut, unwilling to let go just yet.

“Nothing to apologize for,” Shota tells him seriously, letting Izuku do things on his own time, “that sounds traumatic, and you were just a kid experiencing it. You can’t help a panic attack; they’re completely natural, and entirely logical when it comes to stuff like this. We’ll talk more later, okay? But for now, thank you for telling me.”

Izuku pulls his head back away from the man’s chest, scanning Shota’s face as the man finally has a chance to glance down. He lets Izuku’s hands go, scanning the crescent-shaped indents lazily bleeding. Izuku feels silly for hurting himself, but he really hadn’t even realized it even hurt until he was letting up on the pressure.

When the man looks back up at Izuku’s face, he softens, hands cupping the boy’s cheeks as he draws his thumbs gently under his eyes, wiping away the tears. The man shakes his head as he stands, returning to his previous spot, just maybe a little closer to Izuku.

“I remember seeing that attack in the news,” Shota sighs in annoyance, “and I remember being beyond pissed off. It was like watching an active murder just because a couple Pros decided they weren’t suited to help. Which was ridiculous. Anything would’ve helped. A *backpack* helped. I take it… you were the unnamed classmate to throw the backpack?”

Izuku just knows his cheeks light up in embarrassment, “ah, y-yeah.”

He wipes at his face again, cheeks sticky with dried tears, “I had to do something and... I don’t know, I just moved before I realized it? No one was doing anything, and he was... he could’ve died. I couldn’t watch him die knowingly I could’ve helped. I never would’ve been able to live with myself if I just watched and didn’t *try*.”

“And where were you in all this?” Shota speaks up, louder than it should be is he was addressing Izuku again. “You were there, weren’t you? All Might was the name on all those news articles and police reports.”

“I am embarrassed to say I thought I couldn’t help young Bakugou at first.”

Izuku startles, having almost forgotten Yagi-san was even in the room with them.

A new round of embarrassment lifts to his cheeks as he realizes he’d just had a panic attack in front of his mentor— in front of *All Might*. His inner turmoil must show on his face as Oboro snickers at Izuku’s side. Asshole ghost.

Yagi shakes his head like he’s disappointed in himself, continuing levelly, “I was no better than any of the other Pros watching young Bakugou struggle that day; watching and waiting for someone better, and stronger, and more appropriately matched for the villain at hand, Quirk wise, to come along and help.”

“Hang on,” Shota looks back towards the retired Pro, “weren’t you the one to rescue them both in the end? Wasn’t this guy the villain you already caught once?”

“I was,” Yagi winces, “but I’d already hit my limit— seeing young Midoriya’s bravery, rushing into danger to save someone with little regard for himself, that reminded me of myself when I was his age, and what it truly means to be a Hero. To help people, even when you’re outmatched, or overpowered. I pushed myself that day because he reminded me that’s what Heroes do.”

The retired Pro pauses thoughtfully, looking as if he’s trying to decide how to continue.

Yagi bites at the edge of his bottom lip, shaking himself from his thoughts, “One for All was a little bit different when I still had it in its

entirety, so I was able to push myself past the limitations my own body set and help the two of them. After everything was finished, I found young Midoriya on his way home and I offered him One for All — you know potential far better than I, Aizawa, but I knew he'd be a better Hero then I ever could've been if he was given the chance."

The Pro bows his head, but Izuku can just faintly see his lips curving up in a smile, "and I was right. I could not be prouder of the young man he's become— of the *Hero* he's become."

Izuku ducks his head in embarrassment, tears welling in his eyes. Just its happy tears this time.

"I know I messed up, Aizawa," Yagi continues, head still ducked apologetically, "I know you've greatly helped him with One for All, without even knowing it. I'm not vain enough to believe his growth was entirely my doing. You've been a great asset to him. I doubt he'd be the Hero he is today without your aid."

"Uh huh," Shota eyes the man suspiciously, "everything else aside, he's my student, Yagi. I'd do the same thing for any of them. I can see when they're struggling, and I'd be an awful teacher if I ignored it. He just happened to come to me first. Anyone could see he was struggling; you saw what this Quirk of yours did to him at the beginning of the school year, and I didn't know he was struggling so hard because he'd just gotten the Quirk, and not because he was some overzealous, powerfully Quirked brat who figured they could just float through my class because they're strong."

Shota hesitates, frown deepening to a scowl as he regards Yagi, "you isolated him. He should've had a network of help backing him between the teachers, Quirk counselling and Quirk training that he should've been put in instantly, but instead, thanks to your harebrained idea of secrecy and keeping this from me, his *homeroom teacher*, he struggled. I almost kicked him out of my class, Yagi. 1-A has no room for brats who don't put in the effort to control their Quirks."

"Shota," Izuku chides disapprovingly, a warm feeling settling in his chest when the man glances over, looking slightly scolded.

Shota sighs, slumping back into the couch as he eyes Yagi, "just count yourself lucky that he told me that he was a late bloomer, even if you, the *adult*, didn't. I can only help when I know, and when I don't, I can't properly gage someone's potential."

“I truly am sorry,” Yagi offers, looking between the student and teacher, “I did insist upon secrecy, like my mentors before me, but I can see Midoriya does have a network I never did. I suppose I never had someone like you watching over me, Aizawa-san. I really must caution how serious this secret is, Aizawa. All for One is a dangerous man, and anyone who knows is at risk.”

The Pro looks away sharply, “just… this has gotten bigger than either of us now. One for All is flourishing in his hands, doing things I never thought to be possible. I’m in under my head trying to help young Midoriya, and he… he’s barely keeping his own head above water, I can see that. I realize that. I could help with One for All— but I know I can’t teach him Quirks I never possessed.”

The man offers a self-deprecating laugh, a tiny smile on his lips, “perhaps I need more practice teaching, eh, Aizawa? I took a position here to be close to young Midoriya and help him with One for All, but I… actually like teaching.”

The man in question glowers, then sighs, “part of being a teacher is making sure your kids are getting when they need to grow, even if it’s not something you’re capable of. Asking for help, and realizing you're not what they need is a step in the right direction. Don’t get me wrong, you need a lot of work if you’re seriously considering getting a teaching license, but you’re not as awful as you think you are.”

“He never said anything about being *awful*, Shota,” Izuku puffs his cheeks out in All Might’s defense, which just makes the retired Pro laugh heartily. Yagi leans forward to pat Izuku’s knee in silent thanks before settling back into his seat.

Shota lightly shoves Izuku’s shoulder with his own, a tiny smile playing on his lips as he looks back towards Yagi-san, “the kids love you, just… you can’t always be the Hero who saves everyone. You’ll be the bad guy sometimes. You won’t be enough sometimes. And that’s alright. It’s not about *you*, it’s about *them*. And, while we're at it, cut out the blatant favortism. They'll catch on.”

“I… see,” Yagi’s brow has furrowed thoughtfully, nodding to himself. “Any more advice?”

“I don’t know,” Shota flops his hand in a dismissive wave, as he melts back into the couch cushions, “maybe invest in a teaching guide for dummies book or something.”

Izuku squawks in surprise, and Oboro nearly tips off the armrest of the

couch as he cackles.

Yagi just grins in response, “always a man of wisdom, Aizawa-san. Maybe I will.”

“Good,” Shota hums monotonously, “and I hope you know your secret little meetings— don't look at me like that Izuku, of course we know about your meetings— will no longer fly. I will be overseeing this. Izuku is my student, my *kid*, and I damn well will be involved in this. No argument. He needs all the help he can get if he’s going to be manifesting even more Quirks. No argument.”

“Of course, Aizawa-san,” Yagi bows his head.

“Okay,” Izuku breathes out, biting back the relieved smile.

He won’t admit it aloud, but he’s so glad Shota will be a part of this now. He loves All Might, but he knows just as well as the man that they’re out of their depth trying to do this alone.

Shota will help.

He always helps.

“Aannnd all is well in Izuku’s world of secrets!” Izuku glances sideways at Oboro, who is grinning widely, now facing Izuku with his feet on the edge of the cushion, elbows on his knees and his palms cupping his chin, “now all you need to tell them about is me and— hey! Rude! That went through my face!”

Izuku clutches the throw pillow he’s just swung mindlessly at his friend to his chest, smiling sheepishly at the two Pros who watch him wide, surprised gazes, “thought I saw a bug. Sorry?”

Chapter End Notes

> As always, I hope you guys enjoyed! I am posting this far to late at night when I open at my job tomorrow, but I've put this off for far to long! I love protective dadzawa with my whole entire being, and I hope you guys liked this chapter too. I tried to make it good after such a long wait, but only time will tell. I'm still not sure about how this came out, but I liked it. Good amount of angst, and comfort and our lil' green-bean being an emotional wreck is always fun :)
>
> Now, just as a bit of a warning, if you've read When Realities

Collide, you'd have seen there was a passing in my family. That's all still being sorted out, so I can't promise updates. Like I said over there though, nothing is being abandoned if I don't update very fast, and I'm still very much invested in both fics. Just wanted to give you guys a heads up over here too.

Anyways, all that out of the way, thank you so much for reading if you've made it this far. I appreciate every single one of you who waits for these updates. Thanks in advance for any comments you guys are willing to leave-- that's always one of the best parts of posting things on here. You're all so kind <3 I absolutely adore you all!

Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Hello! I'm back :)

So, this chapter is a tiny bit shorter than usual, simply because I had no idea how to actually make it happen so it flowed smoothly. One of those chapters that add a bit more to the story that I feel like it needed to happen, I just had no idea what to do with it.

Anyways! I've got some housekeeping for everyone! Instead of fanart this time, we've got a couple tiktok videos to share! The first is this edit by sapphicvs on tiktok and I absolutely love how it came together! And the next two videos are by qoiku_24, and these are so good?? I just love the art style! Those ones are here and here! Please drop by their videos and check them out! Give the creators some love for their effort! Really amazing work to both of you! :D
(Also, I'm on tiktok under the same user, if anyone wants to tag me in anything related to this! :D)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes some time for Shota to wrap his head around everything he'd learned between Izuku and Yagi.

What was said in that conference room— that was scary. Those were the kinds of secrets that you need time to process— he may have been able to force a calmness into his body language and expression when sat in the room with the two of them, but that doesn't mean he wasn't internally panicking.

It really was a lot to take in. A lot to swallow so suddenly, without warning.

It was surprising, and seemingly *impossible*.

A Quirk that could be passed on from person to person sounded like something of fairytales. Izuku being the *ninth* inheritor of said Quirk? Izuku receiving such a Quirk from the Number One Hero, when he was just fifteen years old— meeting All Might and being promised the Quirk when he was only fourteen?

Shota understands the secrecy, to a certain degree, at least.

He understands the confidentiality that Izuku had been thrust into regarding such a dangerous secret and interacting with a famous man who'd kept this secret since the start of his own Hero career over thirty years ago.

He respects the attempt at trying to keep the kid safe, and protecting such a vital secret that absolutely has the power to upturn society if it got out that something like that even so much as exists, but that doesn't mean Yagi hadn't been stupid about it.

Passing a Quirk like that onto a teenager, essentially a *child*, and not offering anything to help. Shota knows the Pro well enough to know he'd been trying to help Izuku, but Yagi simply doesn't have the training to be a Quirk counsellor or to properly guide Izuku through Quirk training, whether he possessed the dangerous Quirk or not.

Experience will only get you so far, especially when it comes to the unpredictability of Quirks.

Still, he understands, but that doesn't mean he isn't gutted to finally learn the truth. To be let in on a secret he should've been told about the moment Izuku was placed in his class years behind in Quirk control than any of the other students.

He was supposed to protect these kids— to help them grow and learn, and teach them how to be good *people*, let alone how to be good *Heroes* in today's society. He was supposed to be there for the students, but he hadn't been.

There's a small part of him that's angry with himself for never noticing, or, maybe never *digging* is the better choice of words, because he knows he'd always known there was something off about Izuku and that Quirk of his.

It's irrational, he thinks, to be upset at the fact he hadn't helped with something he hadn't known about. It's irrational, but he can't help the pit forming in his stomach the longer he dwells on it, and really picks the situation apart. There had been tells, as miniscule as they'd been.

Frankly, that entire conversation with Izuku and Yagi had more or less blindsided him. He hadn't known what he was expecting when he'd caught the two whispering like school children in the infirmary, but it certainly wasn't anything like the actual truth of the situation.

To learn of Izuku struggling alone, trying to learn a powerful, extremely dangerous Quirk without proper training, or counselling. To know that Izuku had been struggling with something so dangerous, and Shota hadn't had the faintest idea of what that actually entailed; just how dangerous *Superpower* was.

Maybe Yagi hadn't meant to isolate the teenager, but at the end of the day, he had been.

For almost a month between the moment Izuku used that Quirk for the first time on the Zero-Pointer, and when he finally found the courage to confide in Shota that second week of school had almost been a month.

A month of the kid learning on his own, through trial and error that often resulted in fractured limbs and shattered bones. A Quirk too powerful to be contained in his body, despite the muscle Izuku had arrived at school with, and had just kept building as the year progressed. And... hadn't Izuku said something about his Quirk *blowing off his limbs* or something if he'd manifested it too early?

That thought alone has his stomach churning unpleasantly.

Shota glares down into his mug of steadily cooling coffee, stomach too uneasy to even think about taking another sip. Still, he cups the warmth between his hands even if the sight of the coffee makes him want to recoil.

It really feels like a rug has been tugged out from under him, leaving him to flail as he tries to right his footings or catch himself, which feels impossible at the moment.

He feels like an idiot, the longer he analyzes Izuku's time in not just his class, but as his foster son as well. There really had been tells; if he'd just taken the time to look closer.

He and Hizashi had always had suspicions of All Might playing favorites, way prior to them taking the green-haired teenager on as a foster child— Yagi had been blatantly interested in Izuku on that first day; hovering just out of sight as the 1-A students competed in Shota's Quirk assessment test.

Shota had known there was something there, of course, but he never would've been able to guess it was something like a literal mentor-mentee relationship revolving around a newly transferred stockpiling super Quirk. He never would've thought it could've been because Yagi

had known the kid for nearly a year before the entrance exams even took place.

This was way worse than anything he thinks he could've surmised; Shota had decided that same night after he'd made sure Izuku was tucked away asleep in his bedroom in the apartment.

Shota, for one of the first times in his life, hadn't been able to quiet his thoughts and find the same fate as the exhausted teenager.

Something about knowing that irks Shota, even thinking about it now — Yagi should've told them, or, told Shota in the least. He was the adult in this situation, and Izuku is still a minor. He and Hizashi are Pros, teachers and the boy's guardians.

They know secrets and have worked under intense confidentiality agreements, but he knows Yagi hadn't even considered saying a single word about any of it, even if it would've made Izuku's integration with such a powerful Quirk that was entirely new to him less traumatic, even if just a little bit.

Shota is just glad that Izuku had sought him out all those months ago at the start of the school year; confiding in him that he was a late bloomer, and that he was scared of his new Quirk— scared to hurt others and himself.

Shota had known at the time that there was things Izuku was edging around as he explained himself nervously, and Shota will admit he hadn't *really* understood then, as hard as he'd tried to help Izuku along and teach him to control his Quirk and to be comfortable in his own skin handling something so powerful.

It went far, far deeper than that though, didn't it?

The more he thinks about that day now, that conversation that Izuku had prompted, the prouder he is of the kid. That must've been terrifying.

Shota knows Yagi probably wouldn't have been on board at that point, even just from hearing how the man had been whispering about secrecy just that afternoon when Shota had caught him at Izuku's bedside in the infirmary.

He also knows his kid idolizes Yagi. Izuku would never want to hurt or betray Yagi. Shota can only imagine the inner turmoil that had the kid hovering outside his classroom door that day after school. He'd

thought it was odd back then, but now it makes complete sense how hesitant Izuku had been— how he'd skirted around topics and thought awfully hard about what he wanted to say, which wasn't typically a trait high school kids had.

Shota suspects Izuku had told him about being a late bloomer behind the Number One Hero's back. Izuku had made the decision to reach out when he needed help— even if it was just the bare minimum he could ask for without raising suspicion or betraying the trust All Might was offering.

He'd still reached out, and he'd reached out to Shota.

Shota can only imagine what his kid had been through when it comes to that dangerous, stockpiling Quirk that will apparently be additional Quirks. God, he's really not prepared for Izuku to manifest five more Quirks— for his kid to possess *seven* Quirks.

He still can't wrap his brain around that one.

The door to the apartment clicks unlocked, and for a moment, Shota thinks maybe it's Izuku coming upstairs. He glances quickly at the digital clock on the microwave, before determining that Izuku would be long gone in his dorm.

He'd still been exhausted, despite the incident at training happening three days prior. Shota had him on strict rules of no training, and light activity, but thankfully, all Izuku really wanted to do was sleep off the exhaustion and exertion.

Shūzenji dropped by the apartment each afternoon to check in on him, if only to make sure the teenager wasn't sneaking around and training or overworking himself.

Shota would almost be offended at her lack of trust in him, but then again, Izuku is a wildcard who has very little self-preservation skills and Shota wouldn't put it past the teenager to disregard them and keep practicing.

Izuku had spent those first two days after that exercise and the draining conversation, sleeping off the worst of the pesky fever that refused to break. Shota was just happy the physical sickness of Quirk exhaustion had worn off that first day of bedrest.

Shota had never been gladder that they'd had the forethought to plan the battles for a Friday, giving the kids at least some recuperation

time after facing new Quirks and pushing their own abilities.

By the time Monday had rolled around, just that morning, Izuku's fever was nearly broken, so Shota had permitted him to go to classes, so long as he didn't use any of his Quirks until the fever was gone. He'd even forbade the kid from trying to use the new Quirk until Shota had a chance to work with him on it without his peers around.

Shota hears something heavy hit the floor— a bag perhaps— and then there's the sound of keys being set on the storage cupboard they have in their genkan. There's a light bump of leather boots being toed up against the wall and then light footsteps are easing into the apartment.

Shota remains silent, staring at the doorway for his husband to appear.

Hizashi rounds the corner, blinking in surprise.

"I didn't expect to see you up, babe," Hizashi cocks his head faintly, now eyeing the coffee Shota is still clutching distastefully. "You okay?"

"Is it wrong for a man to stay up to greet his husband?" Shota's lips pucker, heart thumping anxiously, yet in annoyance at Hizashi reading him like an open book within seconds of being in the same room as him, "why do you assume something's wrong?"

"No, nothing wrong with it at all," Hizashi hums, arms crossing over his chest as he eases into the room, "just I know you struggle staying up to greet me, as hard as you try. And I didn't *assume* anything, I asked if you were okay. Two totally different things, Sweetheart."

Hizashi hesitates, arms uncrossing as a worried frown curls onto his lips. He regards Shota calmly, finally bringing himself towards the table, "but that response has me thinking something may actually be wrong."

Shota hadn't really told Hizashi much.

The man knew Izuku had overworked himself and had been in the infirmary with a rather serious case of Quirk exhaustion, but that was really just the tip of the iceberg.

Hizashi simply didn't need the extra stress while already out on a mission on the other side of country. Shota knows that Hizashi's focus needs to be on that mission— there's simply no point adding more

worry onto Hizashi's plate when the conversation can wait until he's home and can safely give it his full attention.

Not to mention Shota knows how hung up on their foster son the man is, and he knows once he breaks the news, Hizashi won't be able to stop thinking about Izuku and this Quirk he's got.

He'll probably feel just as guilty as Shota himself for never noticing; they really think too much alike for their own good. Hizashi won't be able to turn the parental worry off and focus on what's going on there, and that's dangerous when he's out in the field.

His focus needs to be on the mission at hand, and not what's going on at home.

Shota knows better than to put Hizashi into a situation like that.

They'd learned early on in both their relationship, as well as their Hero careers, that if it's not time sensitive, or a life-or-death situation, it's not worth distracting the other while they're at work.

And this, as surprising and upsetting as it is to learn their kid has been keeping such a huge, potentially dangerous secret under the insistence of the former Number One Hero, simply is neither of those things as much as Shota wishes they were.

Izuku has had this unimaginable Quirk since before they'd met him, technically, and sure, the thought of these new manifestations is worrying, but as of now, it's simply one new Quirk that they'll be working with.

Hopefully he'll have a handle of it before he manifests another, but there's really nothing they can do about it, whether Hizashi's here or not.

"Babe?" Shota looks up from his coffee, realizing slowly that he'd been too quiet. A cat brushes up against his ankle, and his coffee is not just a cool mug cradled between his hands. "Shota, you're worrying me..."

"We..." Shota draws his eyes away from the worried blonde, fingers tightening on the mug, "we need to talk, Hizashi. It's important."

"Okay..." Hizashi hesitates as an emotion Shota can't quite place settles into his expression, until finally, "is this a you want a divorce '*we need to talk*' or an I forgot to do the laundry and you're upset about it '*we need to talk*'? Also, just for the record, if you do want a

divorce, I am totally fighting you for custody of our son and the cats. I'm open to joint custody."

Shota snorts a laugh of surprise despite the gravity of the situation, "no, I don't want a divorce. I'd never even consider dating anyone else, so you're safe on that front. Only you could wear me down and now you're stuck with me— till death do us part, remember? You're spiraling, Hizashi, it's nothing of the sort."

"Yeah, well, you're scaring me," Hizashi retorts anxiously, hands lacing together on the tabletop as he regards Shota. "Not exactly what you want to hear from your husband when you get home after almost a week away. And totally not the way to ease into what I assume is a serious conversation, sweetheart. I almost had a heart attack. What's this about then?"

Hizashi pauses, staring at Shota for a long second before he draws in a breath, "wait... Izuku was sick— you told me he overworked himself. Quirk Exhaustion, eh? Poor little guy. Does this... have something to do with that? Where is the little listener, anyways? Up here?"

"It does involve Izuku," Shota nods slowly, unsure what else to say. "He's not here. He was finally well enough to sleep downstairs again tonight, and, as far as I know, he's already asleep. The exhaustion hit him hard, his fever hardly broke since that evening he spent in the nurse's office. Today was the first day he was well enough to be up and moving, insisted on going to classes."

"Sounds like him," HIzashi huffs fondly before sobering up to the seriousness. "What involves Izuku if it's not him overusing his Quirk again? Did something else happen? I thought he was past this point of overworking himself and breaking himself when it came to his Quirk. He's been so good with Quirk control."

At this, Shota hesitates.

How are you supposed to ease someone into someone, your child, manifesting a second Quirk. That doesn't happen. You're born with a Quirk— sometimes, very rarely, two Quirks, like Todoroki— but up and manifesting an entirely different Quirk when you're sixteen-years-old is practically impossible.

"Shota," Hizashi warns, voice tight in that scolding sort of way, "you'd better not be figuring out how to sugar coat something for me. I'm a grown up, I can handle whatever it is you have to tell me. Especially when it involves our child."

Shota frowns deeply at being caught, sighing heavily as he slumps back against the backrest of his chair, “Hizashi... he manifested another Quirk.”

“He—” Hizashi cuts himself off, mouth agape as he seems to be processing that. Shota feels a little bad starting the conversation the moment Hizashi got home, but then again, Hizashi hadn’t really given him much of a choice. “He *what?*”

“That’s why he got so sick,” Shota carries on, head bowing down. “He manifested a new Quirk, completely different from his original Quick that he didn’t know how to handle. It was a Quirk accident, that’s the truth of it, but luckily no one was hurt. He did a good job keeping it contained and protecting the other students. He then proceeded to use both his new Quirk, and the original one... *Superpower*.... and I suppose he overused both when not prioritizing one over the other. You’ve seen how emitters manifest. It... it wasn’t pretty.”

Hizashi says nothing for a long second, and Shota just knows the cogs are turning in his husband’s head as he tries to process everything he’d just been told. Finally, Hizashi lets out a shaky breath, eyes staring intently at Shota's face, “how is that even possible? He manifested a second Quirk? *Now*?”

Shota bobs his head in a nod, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

“What else?” Hizashi asks quietly.

Shota lifts his eyes, unsurprised to find lime-green staring right back at him.

“You’re nervous still,” Hizashi analyzes with narrowed precision, still able to read Shota with ease. It’s something the dark-haired man both loves and loathes about Hizashi. “Don’t bite at your lip like that, you’ll split it. Just... tell me the truth, Sho.”

“You...” Shota shakes his head, “this is going to be a long conversation. Go get changed and have a shower. I know how much you hate sitting around in clothes you’ve travelled in. I’ll make us something to drink. I could use some green tea, does that work for you?”

Hizashi frowns hard, eyes narrowed as if studying Shota down to his soul.

“This really must be serious if you’re offering to drink tea instead of coffee,” the man muses, but there’s not an ounce of humor found in his words despite the words themselves being an attempt at soothing humor. “Green tea is fine; I’ll be right back.”

Hizashi stands slowly, disappearing into the genkan first to grab his bag before heading down the hall towards their bedroom. Shota stands, mug in hand as he makes his way to the counter. He sets his coffee mug in the sink and selects everything he needs to make the tea as he listens to the shower turning on.

Hizashi really isn’t wasting any time.

It’s always hit or miss when the blonde enters the bathroom.

Sometimes, most of the time, he takes his time. He can shower for hours and spends ample time perfecting his hair in the morning— does skin care *things* and spends more time shaving and grooming his facial hair than Shota thinks is really necessary, but he’s also able to almost flip a switch and be able to shower and be ready in a matter of minutes if need be.

Shota sighs, knowing it’ll be just minutes before Hizashi is back.

He really doesn’t want to be having this conversation, but he knows Hizashi deserves to know.

Izuku is just as much Hizashi’s kid as he is Shota’s and the fact that their child possesses an age-old transferrable Quirk that has been passed down a line of Heroes all trying to defeat one singular A-tier villain who they hadn’t even realized existed, was something that he should know about too.

Not to mention there was a very good chance Izuku would be manifesting more Quirks— at least five more, if the teen is correct which would bring his grand total of Quirks to a breathtakingly impossible *seven*.

“You’re thinking pretty hard about something,” Hizashi accuses softly.

Shota jumps in surprise, caught off guard, which just makes his husband frown harder when Shota spins on his heels to face the other man. The kettle boils behind him, but he’s a bit busy trying to calm the racing of his heart at being snuck up on.

The blonde is right back at the kitchen table, showered and dressed in

pajama pants and a hoodie that Shota thinks might belong to him. His hair is still wet, halfheartedly towel dried, but pulled up into a messy bun. His regular prescription glasses sit on the bridge of his nose, and there's wrinkles between his eyebrows from how furrowed his expression is.

Shota swallows, turning back to the counter, "sorry."

Hizashi says nothing as Shota goes about making their teas. He wishes he was preparing himself another coffee, but even he knows it's too late for that if he wants to get some sleep and be ready for classes in the morning. As is, he's already afraid he and Izuku will be butting heads about training if the boy still has any remnants of his fever lingering.

Shota turns swiftly to the table, holding two steaming mugs.

"Thank you," Hizashi chews the inside of his cheek as Shota sets the mug down, the blonde not wasting a second before wrapping his hands around the ceramic.

Shota follows suit, distracting himself with the heat soaking into calloused hands.

Shota opens his mouth but... he doesn't know what to say. How to lead into this. He knows it's going to upset Hizashi. He knows Hizashi is going to be worried, and scared, and pissed off. Hizashi respects Yagi, Shota thinks they all do after the man had played such a huge role in protecting not just Japan, but America and a handful of other countries he toured.

Hizashi respects Yagi, but all that will go out the window when he hears what happened— Yagi's carelessness when it comes to passing on this dangerously valuable Quirk to a child that hadn't even made it to high school yet. Yagi deciding that a fourteen-year-old boy was a good candidate to inherit something so powerful— so *dangerous*.

Shota himself had been livid when everything had come to light, and he knows, if Izuku hadn't been in the room too, he might not have been able to control himself as well as he had.

Maybe it wouldn't feel quite like this if they didn't have such a personal connection to Izuku. If they were just teachers finding out the truth about a student in their classes— but they do have that connection, and if no one else is going to be upset that Izuku was put in such a position, making life-altering decisions at just fourteen

without anyone to run things through, Shota and Hizashi will.

And it's really not Yagi's fault. Not entirely, at least.

He was an idiot, no question about that, in the way he did things, but Izuku simply didn't have anyone in his corner before meeting the man. He was a Quirkless child, who no doubt faced discrimination. He was isolated for being different— *belittled*— and Shota knows this just from how Bakugou had regarded the green-haired teenager that first day of school, which makes a lot more sense now that he has all the information.

It was unfortunate circumstances that made this messy.

Izuku was essentially on his own when he'd met All Might, no one to help him reason the pros and cons of accepting a Quirk from a man who was the Number One Hero, but was also a stranger to Izuku, or to help him think logically about the dangers he'd be accepting, or to even just bounce thoughts off of in an attempt to understand the seriousness of what was being offered.

To a fourteen-year-old who had nothing, Yagi had offered Izuku all of his dreams tied up in a neat bow.

Yagi couldn't have known that.

The man hadn't known about Izuku's mother until the teen had told him that day after Shota had found him living on the streets. At the end of the day, Yagi simply offered him something, and Izuku took it.

"I haven't seen you like this in a long time, Sho," Hizashi is the one to break the silence they'd settled into. He's frowning, looking so concerned that Shota isn't really sure how to process it.

Shota sighs, hands lifting off the mug to drag down his face. He breathes out another sigh into his palms before dropping his hands down onto the table.

"I don't know how to tell you," Shota finds himself saying carefully. "I don't know how you'll... *react.*"

Hizashi watches him for a moment, before shaking his head, "this... has something to do with Izuku, right? This... this new Quirk of his. Just... start there. What happened?"

That was logical. Shota could do that.

“It manifested suddenly,” Shota tells him quietly. “Well, I suppose it manifested *out* of him. Tendrils of… of Quirk. Energy, maybe. It was… horrifying, Hizashi. He had no control, but it, that Quirk, was rampant. Flung him around in the air and crashed into pipes— nearly hit some of the other students in the exercise. He was completely at its mercy, and he looked so scared.”

Hizashi draws in a shaky breath, nodding slightly. “Did you stop it?”

“I didn’t,” Shota shakes his head. “By the time I got to them, Izuku was waking up and the Quirk was already neutralized. I talked to Hitoshi and Uraraka after Izuku was with Shūzenji. Hitoshi said he managed to get Izuku under Brainwash and the Quirk just… disappeared when Izuku wasn’t in control anymore. Izuku was out even after Hitoshi released him. And when he… when he got up, he could control the Quirk better. Brat used it during his fight, along with that power Quirk of his. It’s no wonder he passed out from exhaustion.”

“So, a lot happened,” Hizashi says softly. “He really has two Quirks now?”

“That’s just the beginning,” Shota snorts humorlessly. “I don’t want to upset you. I know how you are, especially when it comes to Izuku. It’s a lot, Hizashi and you can’t… we can’t change this. We’re simply being informed and that’s… that’s it. That’s all there is to it, no matter how angry, or upset you are. This is… it’s dangerous. You need to be aware of that before I say anything more. It involves Izuku, but you don’t have to be involved too.”

“Upset me,” Hizashi levels him a glance. Staring seriously into Shota’s own eyes; charcoal grey meeting lime green. “I want to be a part of this if it involves him, Shota. We’re equals. You know that. I don’t care if it’s dangerous. Upset me, please. Don’t leave me in the dark.”

Shota bows his head in a nod, knowing this was exactly how this conversation would go.

“Izuku did not manifest his Quirk in the traditional sense.” Shota stares down into his tea as he speaks, only looking up to watch his husband as he continues, “he doesn’t have a Quirk factor, or he *didn’t*. I don’t know how that changed, if it changed at all, but he… wasn’t born with a Quirk Hizashi. He manifested his Quirk so late because he didn’t have a Quirk to manifest any earlier.”

“He wasn’t…” Hizashi blinks owlishly, “but he’s got… I’ve seen; you’ve

seen his Quirk... How is that even possible, Shota?"

For just a moment, Shota thinks about lying, but he can't do that to Hizashi.

He deserves to know too. He deserves to be a part of this and know about this just as Shota does.

And in the end, Izuku deserves to have people who know too. To not need to keep secrets to protect others, especially others who are supposed to be protecting him. This is a huge secret the child had been harboring, and Shota understands the need for secrecy, doesn't like it but *understands* it, Shigaraki and this All for One villain are dangerous, but secrets like these are draining to keep.

Protecting loved ones by bottling things up. Saying nothing to keep those you care about safe, not risking putting others in danger when you signed up for it.

"There's a villain..." Shota starts quietly, unsure how he's going to explain this. Starting at the beginning seems logical though. That's where Yagi had started, isn't it? "Back at the dawn of Quirks, he manifested what could've possibly been the most powerful Quirk known to man. A Quirk that lets him take and... and give Quirks. At will. He was dangerous, and beyond powerful."

"Why are you telling me this?" Hizashi asks softly, uncertainly, watching Shota with a sharp glance, "the dawn of Quirks was well over two-hundred years ago, Shota. How is this relevant to now? To Izuku?"

"His name is All for One, Hizashi."

When Hizashi sucks in a startled breath, Shota knows he's pieced it together.

They'd all heard the name when the villain had been arrested, even if it hadn't meant anything to anyone else. Just another villain's name. It hadn't even really been covered in the media past the glimpses of the fight between the two that was scarcely recorded through the storm that day.

"That's who... Yagi just fought that villain," Hizashi stumbles his way through his thoughts, "he was just arrested, right after we got Izuku and Bakugou back from the League... he's still alive? He's been... for this long? H-how is that possible?"

Shota nods faintly, “Yagi doesn’t know how either. He thought… All for One was dead, up until recently. The last time they fought, it left them both critical. I assume All for One must’ve stolen a Quirk at some point that would keep him alive for so long, he’s got… he’s got a lot in his arsenal, Hizashi. He’s dangerous.”

“Yagi,” Hizashi snaps the name out, eyes bright and distrustful. “What does Yagi have to do with this? Why does his name keep coming up when it involves Izuku?”

“I’ll get to him,” Shota promises softly, “there’s more to the story, and if you’re going to understand, you need to hear it. I know you want all the answers instantly, but you need to understand the basics before we get to that.”

“Alright,” Hizashi allows, swallowing down his anger. The blonde slumps back in his chair, fingers curling around his cooling drink to calm himself down, “alright, I’m sorry. Keep going. Please. I want to know.”

“All for One… apparently, he had a younger brother,” Shota continues swiftly, trying to remember the important parts of the story that had been shared with him. “A Quirkless, sickly man from how the story went. He wasn’t like All for One. He was opposed to the man and what he was doing, didn’t agree with it at all. All for One… he forced a Quirk onto his brother— an energy stockpiling Quirk. Something his body could handle, I guess. Just… the brother *did* have a Quirk. A dormant transference Quirk. Yagi says the two Quirks melded together and became what’s now known to be a Quirk called One for All.”

“Wait, wait, an energy stockpiling Quirk?” Hizashi breathes out, “isn’t that what Izuku describes his Quirk as? And transference— what does that mean? Like, like a Quirk that can be passed along? That’s insane. That’s impossible, Shota.”

“I know,” Shota winces, “but that doesn’t mean it’s not true. We know so little about Quirks, even to this day; didn’t even know something so powerful could exist out there, let alone exist for two-hundred years without the public catching wind of it. A transferrable Quirk isn’t so insane when considering that.”

“So Izuku really…” Hizashi swallows, reaching up to scratch at his hairline nervously. “I don’t know how to process this, Shota. He’s just a kid. How did… how’d this happen?”

“As far as I’m aware,” Shota pauses, choosing his words carefully,

“One for All has been passed down from wielder to wielder over the years since All for One’s brother had the Quirk forced on him. It’s gotten more powerful with each to possess it. Yagi thinks it’s the only thing that’ll be able to stop All for One’s Quirk... Izuku is the ninth wielder. And Yagi... Yagi was the eighth.”

“So Yagi gave our kid a super Quirk?”

“...essentially,” Shota shrugs awkwardly. That about sums it up, actually. “Like I said earlier, Hizashi, we can’t change this. Izuku has had this Quirk since before we even knew him. All we can do is support him and help him learn so he doesn’t end up in the state he was learning One for All. He... there’s a very strong chance he’s going to be manifesting more Quirks. The past wielder's Quirks. That’s what happened during training. He manifested a new Quirk called Blackwhip. He doesn’t need to be worried about us; he needs to know we’re going to support him.”

“How... how many more?” Hizashi hazards the question, looking like he doesn’t really want an answer, but needs to know despite that. “Please don’t tell me he’s going to have nine Quirks, or, uh, eight, I suppose if Izuku didn’t have one to begin with?”

“Izuku thinks he’ll be getting seven,” Shota doesn’t beat around the bush. “Seven total, but we have no idea what he could manifest. Yagi doesn’t know much about the Quirk, that’s how much of a highly kept secret it is. The circle of knowledge is tiny, Hizashi, we’re not going to get many answers here.”

“Seven,” Hizashi wheezes, dropping his head down into his hands.

“I know,” Shota sighs, sharing the sentiment.

Hizashi keeps his head down for a good second before he’s finally lifting his attention up, expression still serious, “how dangerous is this, Shota? How much danger is our kid in?”

And Shota can’t lie about this, can’t stretch the truth to protect Hizashi.

He needs to know so he can be prepared to protect Izuku and the students as well.

Shota understands not telling all the teachers, if this really is as sensitive and dangerous as it seems, but if they’re lucky enough to be involved, confided in, they need to be prepared for when shit hits the

fan. The two of them are a part of the select few who know now, and Shota'll be damned if he doesn't give his all protecting his kid and students.

"A lot, Hizashi." Shota finally says, voice quiet but serious.

"That's what I thought," the blonde sighs deeply, dry washing his face with his palms like he's still trying to wrap his head around everything, "can we even protect him? If what you're saying is true... this is far bigger than us. This villain and... and the League, we've never been ahead, have we? They're always two steps ahead of us, even when we have All Might on our team..."

"We can only try," Shota shakes his head lightly.

It had taken nearly three days for him to come to that conclusion, but that's really all they can do. They're not invincible, and they can't place themselves on some pedestal when someone like *All Might* nearly died fighting this villain.

At the end of the day, he and Hizashi are only human.

Humans who don't possess the only Quirk believed to be a match for All for One.

"We know now," Shota continues gently. "We know to be prepared. We can help Izuku with these Quirks and, God forbid he ever needs to use them against Shigaraki or All for One, we can ensure he has the best chance at prevailing. Izuku is... he's a *Hero*, Hizashi. We both know that. He might be young, but I think he knew exactly what he was getting himself into."

"I hate thinking about him getting hurt—" Hizashi's voice is wobbly, like he's seconds away from crying. "I hate thinking of him being the only one able to stop this. He's just a kid. He's our kid, Shota. He should be focused on hanging out with his friends, and finding a girlfriend or a boyfriend, or whatever the little Listener wants— worrying about *exams*, not some kind of *war* he's the *secret weapon* in."

Shota's heart breaks— he hates this too.

"I know," Shota consoles quietly. "I agree, but we can't change that. He's safe here for now. All for One was arrested and he's locked away in Tartarus. We need to make the best of this, for him. Izuku deserves that. We'll keep training him and helping him learn. He'll need all the help he can get. He's a part of this, and I don't know about you, but

I'm going to give him the best odds possible."

"Jerk," Hizashi sniffles, a light smile tilting onto his lips, "you know I will too. I love him. I will do anything in my power to keep him safe, just like you, ya'dig?"

"Just making sure," Shota shrugs, offering a soft little smile to his husband.

There's no point in getting hung up on this, and Shota thinks Hizashi has realized that as well.

It's not something they can change, and neither of them are about to treat Izuku as anything more than a student and their kid. He's not some war machine, he's a child and they'll prioritize that while still making sure he's getting the training he needs to not end up a casualty.

They settle into a second of content silence, each just taking a moment to process everything.

Hizashi's slumped back in his chair, hands still cupped around his mug with his head lulled back and his eyes shut, while Shota is slumped forwards now, the weight of his upper body supported by his elbows and his fingers loosely hooked through the handle of his mug.

"Welcome home, by the way," Shota clears his throat lightly, drawing Hizashi's gaze back down to him. "We missed you; Izuku and I. It's too quiet without you here."

The blonde's lips curl into another smile, just maybe a little huffy now, "thanks, babe," Hizashi snorts out good-naturedly.

Shota knows he's a bit late on that one, but he wanted to get the serious talk out of the way first.

Hizashi wilts a little, softening slightly, "I missed you both as well. I was so ready to come home. I can't wait to hug the little Listener tomorrow, especially after all of this. I wish he was up in his room in the apartment, I really want to just make sure he's okay, you know?"

"He's okay," Shota assures, "he was a bit fevered when I sent him downstairs after dinner, but I'm hopeful it'll be gone by tomorrow morning. He's starting to go stir crazy. He didn't hurt himself; it was just the exhaustion. Shūzenji cleared him, remember. She would've kept him if she deemed it necessary."

“Exhaustion is still serious,” Hizashi reminds snippily, sipping at his tea, “man, I do not want to see Izuku going through this five more times. Manifestations are hard enough as is, I don’t know what ample will do to the poor kid’s body and mind. We don’t even know what he’ll be getting. It’s like the worst game of gacha to exist.”

“Hound Dog will be the next one I inform,” Shota promises, because even if Yagi hadn’t prioritized proper manifestation etiquette, Shota sure as hell will. “Not the vital details of course, but the chance that Izuku might be manifesting additional Quirks. I doubt he’ll ask questions; he knows confidentiality well as a Pro and a licensed counsellor, and I honestly doubt anyone would be able to figure out Izuku has a transferable Quirk that dates back to the dawn of Quirks without additional information. That’s illogical.”

“That’s insane,” Hizashi muses in agreement, but his lips turn downwards slightly as he winces. “Yeah, I doubt anyone could figure that one out. I’m glad though, Izuku needs a professional Quirk counsellor. And training, of course, but you’re obviously the best choice for that. Man, this’ll be rough, won’t it?”

“It might be,” Shota bows his head in a nod. If this first manifestation was anything to go off, they really might be in for a ride. “He’s a strong kid though, you should’ve seen how fast he managed to grasp at that Quirk when it manifested. It’s like he suddenly knew the secret of controlling it when he came to. I’ve never seen anything quite like it.”

“He really is a remarkable kid, isn’t he?” Hizashi blows out fondly, sipping at his tea.

“He’s something,” Shota agrees lightly, hiding his own small smile behind the rim of his mug as he follows suit, sipping lukewarm tea. “A problem child is more accurate.”

“Stop it,” Hizashi laughs, swatting playfully at Shota’s forearm from across the table, “I know you *adore* that kid. He’s not just a ‘problem child’, he’s *your* problem child. Just admit you love him already, grouchy pants.”

Shota doesn’t reply, but he’s well aware that his smile widens faintly behind his mug and his eyes soften in adoration at the thought of their kid.

Izuku really does have him wrapped around his finger, doesn’t he? He’d never gotten quite so attached to a foster child because he knew

more often than not, the kids placed with them were in passing. A couple nights, maybe a week if needed, but then they were gone again.

But there was something different about Izuku, somehow the child just fit with them.

Shota had never pictured himself having a child, not when he was little, or when he and Hizashi got married, but now he can't seem to imagine their lives without the green-haired child.

Dad.

Izuku had called him Dad. Shota had almost forgotten.

Maybe the kid was starting to feel the same way.

"What's got you smiling like that?" Hizashi reaches across the table, finger hooking over Shota's wrist to pull his hand away from his mouth. "C'mon, Sho!"

"He called me dad," Shota confides softly, eyes staring down into his drink as his lips twitch into another smile as Hizashi gasps in excitement. "I'm not sure if he realized it, but he did."

"He did?" Hizashi is positively grinning; beaming from cheek to cheek, "that's amazing, sweetheart! I wish I could've heard it; I totally miss him calling us dad and papa, even if it was just the once. Awh, man, I was so sure he'd call me Papa first, but I guess Nem wins this round. Never take a bet with her, Shota, it's like she's a witch or something."

"Bets are illogical anyways," Shota remarks in a scoff.

"Bets are fun," Hizashi laughs, "you're just a poor loser who can't bet right to save his life."

"Stop betting on our child," Shota shakes his head, still reveling in Izuku calling him dad to feel offended at the teasing jests from Hizashi. "Like I said, I doubt he even knows he did it. I didn't mention it, and he didn't seem to realize."

"But he wasn't drugged up this time," Hizashi smiles knowingly, "that's a step in the right direction. Gah, I love that little Listener. He called you dad, that's the sweetest news I could've gotten. I needed that after, well, everything else, ya'dig? I hope he calls me Papa again

soon."

Shota's heart swells fondly, "I really liked it, Hizashi."

"I'm sure," the blonde's smile softens, regarding Shota with such soft, fond eyes. "You're a good dad, Shota. He just needs time. Hopefully soon he'll let himself think of us as his dads. He really needs people he trusts in his life and we're not going anywhere anytime soon, yeah? I hope he knows that."

"I'm not sure Izuku really trusts anyone," Shota finds himself saying.

And it's also something he's thought about a lot.

Every time he thinks they're making progress; it feels like the teenager finds a way to wall himself off. Izuku has always been a strange kid, there's no arguing that, but he'll live a lonely life if he doesn't start letting himself trust others. Shota understands the secrecy that came along with the knowledge of, and possessing, One for All, but now... maybe now that they know the kid will ease up a little.

Shota had learned that the hard way until he'd let Hizashi and Oboro whisk him away into a life of friendship and near constant companionship that he couldn't hide from if he tried.

He wouldn't change it for anything.

"Yeah," Hizashi worries his bottom lip, suddenly looking crestfallen, "I know. I worry about the little guy too. At least he and Hitoshi are pretty close, and he is getting more and more comfortable with us too. It's not a sprint, it's a marathon."

Shota nods.

Hizashi is right, of course. They need to pace themselves. They need to be here for the long run. Izuku is a child who'd been wronged all his life— left in isolation for reasons beyond him. Abandoned, and left alone in ways a child should never be. They're finally finding more puzzle pieces, putting things together in a way that's starting to assemble a picture.

Honestly, it's no surprise he's so hesitant to let anyone in.

"Hey..." Hizashi calls after a long, thoughtful second. "Do you... I don't know, I know you don't really believe in ghosts, but... what about guardian angels? Where's your stance on that?"

“Guardian angels?” Shota cocks his head to the side. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know,” Hizashi shrugs sheepishly, frowning down at his tea. “Just… I like to think maybe he’s not as alone as we think he is. Doesn’t he… I don’t know, remind you of Oboro a bit?”

“Oboro?” Shota stills, hands tensing against the ceramic mug.

“He just reminds me of him,” Hizashi breathes out. “Some of the little things he does, and just… I don’t know, how he is, I guess? Sometimes I just… I swear Oboro’s around, you know? Like, I know he’s gone. He’s been gone for… for a long time, but Izuku just feels so familiar. Sometimes I look at that kid, and I can’t help but feel… Oboro’s around too, ya’dig?”

Shota’s brow furrows as he processes that. “You think Oboro is… a guardian angel to Izuku?”

“Maybe?” Hizashi shrugs one shoulder lightly. “I know it’s not, like, real or anything, and I know you’re not spiritual at all and I’m not really either, but I just… I think he would’ve really loved the kid if he were alive, you know? I think… he’d protect him, maybe even for us? I just get this feeling sometimes. It’s dumb, I guess, but I sorta like to believe Izuku has someone with him, watching over him. And there’s no one I’d trust more than Oboro to keep an eye on him.”

“It’s a nice thought,” Shota allows himself to admit. “Where is this coming from though?”

“I just can’t help but think,” Hizashi admits quietly. “It’s little things, really. Nothing significant until you put them all together. Like… remember how I told you Izuku ordered Oboro’s coffee order? Down to the weird special request of cinnamon and the chocolate croissant? It’s not strange as is, but then you throw in things like the USJ where you… you were so sure you’d seen him, Shota. So sure he was there with Izuku that day. I just… maybe he’s watching over our kid for us. Y’know, keeping an eye on him when we can’t?”

Shota swallows.

He had never found a logical explanation for seeing his dead school friend standing behind his very alive student. Not to this day. There was simply no way to debunk that besides hiding behind the excuse of trauma and head injuries, but no matter how much he tried to tell himself it was impossible, he can never truly convince himself of it.

He knows what he'd seen that day.

And then there was other suspicious things, unimportant on their own, but when linked to other things...?

Kota, for example.

The young boy sobbing into Shota's shoulder about a 'guardian angel' that had been with Izuku the night Izuku had fought muscular in an attempt to defend the child, and even Eri— the odd things the little girl says about Izuku's friend, and how her expression had lit up when Kota mentioned Izuku's *guardian angel* when the two of them met.

They'd suddenly been on the same wavelength, leaving Shota standing cluelessly as the children beamed at one another knowingly.

You can't just brush something like that off. Not really.

Then there was the streetlights incident.

Something had led him right to the teenager that night. It's not like Izuku had been in plain sight, no, he'd been tucked away in the depth of a darkened alleyway, wedged out of sight between a wall and a dumpster. Shota had been led away from his route, and directly to a poorly lit alley.

Maybe it had been his eyes playing tricks on him or... maybe it was some sort of fate leading him right to a child who needed him. A guardian angel leading the way to their kid, who'd just been a student at the time.

It takes a long second to process the thought that maybe he'd been guided to something he and Hizashi needed that night.

It wasn't entirely illogical.

Shota thinks of everything the kid's been through, even just what Shota knows about since he'd met the kid; the sports festival, his homelessness, the Hosu incident, being beat within an inch of his life and then kidnapped before he could receive help or medical attention.

Izuku had come out of everything *alive*, against all odds— maybe he does have someone watching over him. It's not entirely illogical, Shota thinks. And even if it *isn't*, it's a... nice thought. He knows Oboro, knows that he'd find any way he could to help people, even if it was just watching over their child for them.

“That...” Shota draws in an unsteady breath, refusing to look up, “that does sound like something Oboro would do. I don’t know if I... that’s irrational, Hizashi, but... you’re right that it’s a nice thought. I’d like to think he might be... watching over Izuku too.”

“Yeah,” Hizashi hums out softly, “it really is. I like to think he’s still hanging around. I... really miss him. He just... he would’ve adored Izuku, ya’dig? I wish they could’ve met, but I’m happy with the thought he’s keeping an eye on our sunshine for us, you know? Makes me feel a bit better about all of this.”

Shota bows his head in a nod, frowning lightly.

“It’s a nice thought,” the dark-haired man reiterates quietly.

Shota still isn’t the type of man to believe in such nonsense, but he can’t argue that the thought doesn’t make his chest feel warm. If anyone needs someone watching over their shoulder and keeping an eye on them, it’s definitely Problem Child.

It’s just a bit of peace of mind.

Even if it’s just pretend.

Chapter End Notes

> Oboro, sneezing for the first time in thirteen years, mystified: "what the hell was that?"
> Izuku, startled awake in bed at the noise, staring wide-eyed at his ghost: "A sneeze? Bless you? Someone must be talking about you."
> Oboro, visibly confused and afraid of sneezing as a ghost: "Who the hell is awake at two AM talking about *me*?"
>
> I hope this came together alright? Apologies for not having either sunshine boy in this chapter, but worry not, they will return in the next chapter! I just needed some Erasermic being the absolute best dads in the world. They're sweethearts :)
>
> Anyways, as always! Thank you so much for taking the time to read! I appreciate each and every one of you who have continued to read this fic! Each day I'm surprised by how big it's gotten! Comments are very greatly appreciated, I always look forwards to hearing feed back from you guys! Definitely one of my favorite parts of writing! < 3

Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

> Hello! I'm so sorry I've been gone for a while. Was not a great time; we had another death in the family, I got super sick for a while there and then our tiny staff at work was either sick or on vacation, so I had to work a lot more D: so there was no time for anything, but I'm back!
>
> And I bring some new fanart along with my return! Feel free to check out the beautiful art of Izuku and Oboro during Oboro's birthday in chapter 19 done by @mafumafu-sleepyhead on Tumblr and Hikari_kai here on ao3! Thank you so much for sharing your work with us!
>
> This chapter is a bit slower paced, mostly filling in a couple gaps, since we are getting into the endzone for this fic, but I hope you enjoy anyways! Now, enough from me; on with the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tuesday morning, Izuku finds himself up in the apartment having breakfast with his guardians.

He'd needed to sneak away after coming back from his morning run, since it was about the time his classmates would be getting up and getting ready for the day, which usually meant everyone joining up for breakfast in the common area.

Izuku is excited to see Hizashi humming away at the stove when he sneaks into the apartment, which Shota had texted him that it was unlocked.

Hizashi swirls around when he spots the movement, and Izuku finds himself wrapped in a tight hug before he even realizes the blonde-haired man had moved. Seriously, it's like Hizashi had teleported across the kitchen.

Izuku melts into the tight embrace, doesn't mind that Hizashi is all but squeezing him. He'd missed Hizashi a lot. The apartment upstairs just wasn't as lively, and as cool as Nezu-sensei was, the rodent just wasn't a good stand in English teacher.

Izuku had missed Hizashi in both a personal and an academic setting.

And he knows Shota is always a little blah whenever his husband is gone too, so Izuku is glad he's back. Izuku is quite sure the underground Hero had been living off of jelly pouches and coffee solely, even if he'd made an effort to feed Izuku real food while he'd been recovering from Quirk exhaustion.

Everything can go back to normal. He'd missed normal.

There's something about the tight hug, the squeeze of it, that makes Izuku think that Hizashi might know about everything now. He doesn't doubt Shota would've wasted a second before including Hizashi in the secret, and Izuku doesn't know if that upsets him, or fills him with ease.

He supposes he's just glad that he didn't have to be the one to tell Hizashi, and that the man has had some time to let the information *settle* before Izuku sees him.

He thinks... it's nice to know they both know, even if he is a little worried about it all. He doesn't know how that'll change things for him, between them, if it even does at all.

Hizashi doesn't mention One for All though, as he ushers Izuku into his chair and calls down the hall for Shota to join them. Only seconds later, the underground Hero is joining them, flopping into his own seat in front of a steaming mug of coffee.

The fresh salmon smells heavenly, pan seared and served with miso soup and rice. This is nice as well— he usually just ends up having quick meals with the rest of the class when they're all in a hurry to not be late for Shota's class.

It's always nice to just sit upstairs with his guardians and actually enjoy a meal.

Especially a meal Hizashi made because that's always good.

Conversation flow easily, Hizashi telling them all about his time across the country and the villain he helped take down. It was an organization, a bit like the Shie Hassaikai, though of course, there were no children being used to make Quirk erasing bullets. Izuku hopes there are no children in the position Eri had been in anywhere.

When they'd finished eating, just before Izuku has to reintegrate himself with his classmates without raising questions of his absence, Izuku can just pout as Shota's palm flattens over his forehead without

a word, to check for a fever, which is thankfully broken now.

He's back to his regular temperature, and he's feeling completely fine, and if by the way Shota's brow relaxes slightly when he doesn't feel any heat this check, Izuku knows he'll be pushing him in classes again. Good, Izuku was starting to get sick of light training and Shota insisting on Quirkless training for the class just because Izuku wasn't fit to use his Quirks.

He really is thankful the man hadn't benched him entirely, even if he had kept a close eye on him. It was kind of him, but Izuku knows the rest of the class is going to be antsy to start back up with their own Quirks again. Quirkless training had thrown everyone for a loop, even if it was a useful skill to have as a Pro, especially with Quirks like Erasure out there.

Quirk exhaustion is not fun, Izuku had decided on day three of his lingering fever that prevented him from training, so he's glad to be feeling better again. Even if he is anxious to get back out there in training and start working with Blackwhip.

He knows that if he's going to be manifesting more Quirks, whenever the vestiges decide to force them onto him like they'd done with Blackwhip, he needs to use every break in between manifestations to his full advantage and try to train the Quirks before he gets overwhelmed by them.

The sooner he starts getting ahold of Blackwip, the sooner he'll be ready for the next curve ball.

He doesn't want to be the kid with several different Quirks that he can't control. It was bad enough when he'd been that kid with just One for All, and now again with Blackwhip, which had very narrowly missed hurting the people he loves.

Izuku slips out the door after their quiet breakfast with a ghost as a shadow and a full stomach, effortlessly joining up with the rush of class 1-A slipping out the door as to not be late for homeroom class.

He's so glad for everything to be back to normal.

Classes return to usual after the fiasco that had been him manifesting a new Quirk in the middle of an exercise. He's a bit surprised no one's upset with him after he'd almost hurt them— everyone was more worried about *him*. He'd never thought he'd ever have friends like his

classmates, and the thought makes his heart all warm and fuzzy.

He'd started seeing Hound Dog again after a rather lengthy break between being kidnapped from the summer camp and all the effort and time he'd put in helping with the Shie Hassaikai raid and Eri.

He simply hadn't had time talk with the Pro when he was already so busy with everything else going on around him. Izuku thinks he might've needed someone to be able to talk things through with; his still lingering thoughts of his mom, being kidnapped, that raid and Eri, but he's also glad no one was forcing him to process faster than he was capable of.

He thinks he might've spiraled if anyone insisted he start seeing Hound Dog again.

It feels different when Shota leads him down and they talk to Hound Dog about Quirk Counselling only. He knows he needs that; he really doesn't think he could survive this without a Quirk counsellor, but during that first session, Izuku can't help but miss being able to talk about other stuff.

He'd steadily been letting things build up around him, as much as he tries not to, and he just... he feels safe in Hound Dog's office. The man is familiar, and kind, and honestly one of the first adults who'd managed to get Izuku to feel like this around them, behind Aizawa-Sensei and All Might, at least.

And Hizashi, but that relationship had come a bit later.

He knows Hound Dog is busy though, his time is limited, and he'd already so graciously offered Izuku's time slots in the morning back to him because manifestations like this are serious and Izuku is going to need counselling if he's going to do this better than he had with One for All, and even Blackwhip.

Izuku's relieved the adults around him are acknowledging how important these Quirks are going to be, even if most don't have a full understanding and probably never will. It's nice that they're making him a priority when this could end up dangerous— he doesn't know what he's going to be getting from the vestiges, so he really needs to be ready.

It had actually been Izuku who'd asked Hound Dog if they could use half of one of the two sessions that he'd been offered for Quirk counselling to instead do some regular counselling. He knows he

needs to put a lot of time into Quirk counselling since he could very well (was totally going to be) manifest five more Quirks, five entirely different Quirks.

The Pro had cocked his head at the request, and instead offered an additional half an hour during each session that they could dedicate to regular counselling, which Izuku had gratefully taken him up on. Izuku knew Quirk counselling was serious, and that he'd need the time being offered for exactly as it was being offered for, but he was also glad to have some time to wade his way through everything else going on around him.

Izuku hadn't really liked the idea of seeing the guidance Counseller at the beginning of the year when Shota had offered it up, but he can't argue that he doesn't feel better not bottling everything up. Having someone to talk to who isn't a guardian, close friend or a direct teacher is nice, and Hound Dog is really good at what he does— it's no doubt why he's employed at such a prestigious school.

Shota and Hizashi had seemed so proud of him when he'd told them he was going to be heading to counselling half an hour early for some additional help.

Something warm had settled in his stomach at their prideful smile shot in his direction.

Maybe it was the right decision to make.

Following his visits to Hound Dog, Izuku and Shota had drawn up another Quirk training plan, almost exactly the same, just a bit more intense in hopes of getting ahead of these manifestations in his near future.

It's basically just the original plan— morning training before classes on Monday and Friday, and an afternoon session on Wednesday afternoon. They also pick up an afternoon training session on Saturday, which is followed by Izuku trailing up to the apartment for dinner with his guardians.

Sometimes Hitoshi joins them for those training sessions too, which Izuku likes more than he'd care to admit. Izuku feels bad at how much Shota is putting into this— all these after school sessions, not even to mention the ones he has with Hitoshi too, but the man is always quick to assure he'd rather do this then watch anyone get hurt.

Izuku wishes there were more people in the world like Shota.

Besides his schedule being a bit more grueling, in a good way, of course, nothing really changes. Sometimes Hizashi joins them for Quirk training— which is always awesome because Izuku knows Hizashi has loads of good tips for controlling unruly Quirks.

Other times, Yagi-san is there with Shota, watching with a light smile as Izuku follows Shota's orders in training. Shota seems to work surprisingly well with Yagi-san, which Izuku honestly hadn't been expecting, and it's nice to not have to be worried about his guardian punching the other man after everything that had happened before Izuku ended up in 1-A. He knows Shota hadn't been impressed at how Izuku had inherited One for All, but it's not Yagi-san's fault entirely. Izuku is the one who'd taken the proffered Quirk, had hardly given it a thought before accepting what was being offered.

It's nice having more people offering tips and help along the way.

Yagi-san is a bit more involved now that he no longer has those embers of One for All left, and having Shota and Hizashi in his corner is a weight of his shoulders. It's also refreshing to see the three of them playing nicely when he's around— all three are such important parts of his life now and he doesn't want them hating each other.

Especially over him and One for All.

And, at the end of the day, no matter if his guardians and mentors don't exactly like each other, Izuku knows he needs all the help he can get. And he thinks everyone involved is on the same page.

It's a warm feeling to know they can put things behind them for his sake. He doesn't want to cause any more problems between people he loves, like he had with his mom and dad, and even between himself and his mother.

Mom and dad had never been able to get over things, but clearly Shota, Hizashi and Yagi-san can.

He can't imagine manifesting any more Quirks without the help of his guardians and the retired Number One Hero.

"I can't believe you managed to catch Shota in Blackwhip," Oboro is snickering to himself as Izuku, Hitoshi and the ghost himself walk up the stairs to the apartment.

Izuku pouts, "I wasn't aiming for Shota. I was aiming for Hitoshi."

“We’re talking about that, huh? Well, what can I say?” Hitoshi grins sharply, “your aim clearly sucks.”

“One to talk,” Oboro snorts fondly.

“No way,” Izuku shakes his head with a laugh, “you just used your uncle as a human shield. Blackwhip totally would’ve caught you if you hadn’t hidden behind him. And my aim is getting so much better, you’ve had, like, almost a year of practice with your capture weapon and you still end up tied up in it.”

“It took Shota seven years to master it!” Hitoshi whines, glaring daggers as the capture weapon pooled around his neck as he walks, “I still think it hates me. There is no other reason why is keeps tying me up— I swear I spend more time caught in it then anyone else and it’s supposed to be on my side!”

“A piece of fabric can’t hate you,” Izuku chides as he pushes open the stairwell door for them to step through, “Blackwhip could hate me though. My spine still hurts from where it launched me into a wall today. I was doing so well with it too.”

“Yeah,” Hitoshi winces, “that was rough. I swear, I think I saw Shota’s life flash before his eyes when you flew through the air. I’d never seen him so tense as he rushed to your side, man.”

“Ouch,” Oboro nods in sympathy, “you’d think your vestige friends would invite you back into the Quirk and explain their Quirks to you better, y’know, if they’re going to be handing them off, but sure, why not just throw you in headfirst and watch you sink.”

“I’m swimming, jerk,” Izuku scoffs.

“I’m lost again,” Hitoshi sighs heavily, looking between Izuku and Oboro’s general direction.

“Sorry,” Izuku offers a sheepish smile. “It's not important, he’s just being passive aggressive again.”

“Ah,” Hitoshi nods, like it’s the most normal thing ever.

Hitoshi knows that, more often than not, Oboro is trailing along after Izuku. The purple-haired teen had just accepted the fact that Izuku was a package deal— a buy one, get one free where the *get one free* just so happens to be a clinging ghost. It makes Izuku happier than it probably should to have a friend who accepts the ghost so easily.

It's nice not having to watch everything he's saying, and he does feel bad about how he'd been treating Oboro after their fight in Recovery Girl's office just weeks ago. Izuku even likes to think that after everything Oboro and Hitoshi had done together while he'd been stuck with the League, that they'd gotten closer too, even if there was that barrier between them.

"You're so mean to me," Oboro pouts, "I wouldn't need to be passive aggressive if they weren't stuck up assholes who expect the world of you but give you nothing back in return. Like seriously, they can't even offer a heads up? Giving you riddles as if they're warnings and going back on their word. *Not ready*, my ass."

Izuku lulls an exasperated look in Oboro's direction.

The ghost's pout turns more theatric, "fine, I'll let it go for now. I still don't like them though. If I ever meet them, we're gonna throw hands — *favorite* ghost vs seven jerky liar ghosts. 1v7, come at me, cowards."

"You never have, and your odds on that fight are impossibly low, just so you know," Izuku reminds as he pauses outside the apartment door, hand on the doorknob. Izuku glances over to a pouting, confused Hitoshi, "sorry again. He's all heated up."

Hitoshi shrugs as the pout returns to Hitoshi's usual plain expression, "as long as he doesn't want to fight me, I'm good. Confused, definitely, but good."

"I would love to fight you!"

Izuku bites back a smile, "he doesn't."

"Bad translation!" Oboro accuses dramatically, as he crosses his arms over his chest in a huff, "you never let me have any fun. Of course, I meant a *friendly* fight. Like when I used to lay his uncle out flat during class. Friendly."

Izuku waves him off with a laugh, finally turning the doorknob and pushing the door open. He and Hitoshi slip out of their shoes as Oboro makes his way into the kitchen where Izuku hears voices.

"I just don't know if we should tell him..." That's Hizashi's voice Izuku hears, a low whisper. He sounds a little worried. "Does he *need* to know?"

"I'd want to know if someone who kidnapped me was arrested,"

Shota's light voice replies. "It came from Tsukauchi himself. I also think he'd like to know. Yagi seemed relieved, maybe he will be too. Gran Torino was involved too; you know he was worried about that dinosaur of a Pro when he wasn't a part of the raid."

Izuku and Hitoshi share a look as they trail quietly into the kitchen. Shota and Hizashi obviously hadn't heard the door open and shut or heard the teenagers thumping around in the genkan.

"Tell who what? Someone was arrested?" Hitoshi pipes in as soon as they're stood shoulder to shoulder in the doorway, like children peering in to ask if dinner is ready yet.

Both men startle, whipping around to face the doorway.

Hitoshi snickers, "where's your situational awareness, huh, oh great master of awareness Eraserhead?"

"I shouldn't need to be aware of brats sneaking around in my own home," Shota scowls, eyes narrowing pointedly on Hitoshi, "you just lost dinner privileges, brat."

"No, he has not," Hizashi scoffs, swatting lightly at Shota's shoulder. "What have I told you about threatening people when you're embarrassed, huh? They're allowed to be here— we're literally expecting them, teenage sass and all. Now, how much did you listeners hear?"

"N-not much!" Izuku promises, looking away guiltily, "we, um, didn't mean to eavesdrop or anything... Just... we heard that someone was arrested and... and you mentioned my internship mentor. Is he okay?"

"Yeah, he's okay," Shota slumps in his chair, "we're just hearing about it, but it happened about the time of the Shie Hassaikai raid. I got the call on my way up here. A member of the League has been taken into custody; we thought you might like to know. That portal villain. They're still looking into him, in the process of getting DNA tests and finding his identity still— they actually didn't say much, but he has been arrested, and Tsukauchi thought it might give you some peace of mind after everything."

"Kurogiri?" Izuku blinks in surprise.

Shota and Hizashi blink in contained surprise at Izuku knowing the villain's name. He remembers Kurogiri introducing himself at the USJ, and again when he'd been kidnapped, but he supposes it's still strange

to know it so well. When you think of the League, you think of Shigaraki, not his henchmen.

“Who?” Hitoshi cocks an eyebrow, glancing between Izuku, Shota and Hizashi.

“Oh, um,” Izuku bites his lip, “Kurogiri. I... don’t know his name. His real name, I mean. That’s just what he introduced himself as when I was kidnapped. He was Shigaraki’s handler, I think, so... so that’s um, good, but also bad, I think?”

“Good and bad?” Hizashi turns from the stove, eyebrows furrowed in confusion, “what do you mean, Listener? You don’t think it’s good?”

“Uhm, well,” Izuku bites at his lip, shifting nervously, “good that he was arrested, I suppose. I’m glad that he’s off the streets and not a threat to us anymore. Shigaraki doesn’t have his main mode of transportation either now but um... he really was a handler of sorts. From what I could see he kept Shigaraki in line and... and took care of him. Like, he, uh, was weirdly devoted to Shigaraki.”

“So, you think Shigaraki could go off the hinges without his handler?” Shota asks slowly.

Izuku gives a sheepish shrug, “I mean... I don’t know, but it’s a possibility. His Sensei was already arrested and now... now Kurogiri too. Shigaraki already isn’t, well, *all there*, so...”

“Well, shit,” Shota sighs, dry washing his face in his palms. “I never really considered that, and I doubt Tsukauchi has either. We couldn’t not arrest him, he’s a threat and Shigaraki having use of his Quirk is dangerous but... yeah, fuck. We should be prepared for something like that, thanks for the heads up, Kiddo.”

Izuku nods, more to himself than anyone else.

“Was Kurogiri...” Izuku bites hard at his lip, “was he hurt? Is... is he okay?”

“Why are you wondering about a villain?” Hitoshi is the first to ask the question that’s obviously on everyone’s mind, whipping around to face Izuku. “Does it matter?”

“He kidnapped you,” Oboro adds, brow furrowed, “I know you have this whole nice guy thing going on, but that man tried to kill your class. He stole you from a summer camp and held you hostage for

three days. He's a bad guy, he doesn't deserve your sympathy."

Shota and Hizashi say nothing, just looking between the teens.

"I know," Izuku winces, speaking to both his friends, "just... he was the only one who was kind to me when I was, um, when Shigaraki had me. I don't know... but, there was just something different about Kurogiri. He gave me water and, and pain medication and I don't know if I would've—" *survived* sits on the tip of his tongue, but Izuku wisely doesn't mutter the word aloud.

Shota and Hizashi's faces are pinched like they're finishing the sentence on their own and it physically pains them to think of any different outcome to him and Kacchan getting rescued, and Oboro's frown is so deep it's upsetting to see on the usually bright and grinning face. Hitoshi sports his own small frown, looking between everyone in confusion, not entirely on the same page.

Izuku forces out a breath, bowing his head, "—he helped me, and I don't even think Shigaraki knew. I know he's a villain, but he wasn't *awful* to me. And... I don't know, he just wasn't like the rest of the League. There was something off about him."

"What was off about him?" Shota asks calmly as Izuku and Hitoshi finally make their way into the kitchen, each settling at the table with Shota.

Izuku doesn't know how to really explain it, so he simply shrugs and keeps quiet.

He can't put it into words. He knows Kurogiri is bad, and that he works with Shigaraki. He knows the man is blindly loyal to Shigaraki but... Hana's words linger in the back of his head *'he gave him Kurogiri'* he remembers the ghost child saying about All for One. *'I don't know where Sensei found him, or what they did to him'* Izuku swallows hard at the words fluttering around in his head.

That's really all he remembers of that conversation— just those two things. It's not a lot, but it puts things into perspective. A perspective Izuku can't tell anyone about.

It's one thing to walk out of being kidnapped with some information, it's another entirely to claim a villain is there against their will, which is stupid because Kurogiri is clearly loyal. It just sounds stupid.

Still, Izuku can't help but think.

“You really want to know about him, Sunshine?” Hizashi is the one to break the silence. Izuku whips his head up and nods slowly, trying not to frown at Hizashi uncertain look, “he’s at Tartarus. As far as Shota heard, he’s fine but he… I know he was good to you for a little bit there, but he deserves to be where he is. He’s safe there, and he can’t hurt anyone else.”

Izuku nods thoughtfully. That makes sense.

“Okay,” Izuku breathes out. “Sorry, I just—”

“No apologies,” Shota cuts him off. “No one experienced what you did. Maybe… maybe he helped you, but he’s still one of the people who took you away in the first place. You’re allowed to regard him however you’d like, and we can’t change that. We have no right to try to change your own personal views. He wasn’t kind to us, but he was to you.”

“But he’s a villain,” Hitoshi wrinkles his nose in offense.

“Yes,” Hizashi agrees quietly, turning back to the stove and stirring what smells to be curry, “but he wasn’t cruel to Izuku. Until we’re in the same position, which I hope none of us ever end up in, we have no right to tell Izuku how to feel about this. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to know the wellbeing of someone who was kind to you, even if they’re villains.”

Hizashi pauses, and then, looking at Izuku he adds as an afterthought, “empathy is a good trait for a Hero to have, Sunshine. You have a very kind heart, and I’m glad that hasn’t changed after everything.”

Izuku bows his head in a nod, heart still hammering in his chest.

“Yeah,” Hitoshi frowns, “alright.”

“Why…” Oboro starts slowly, pausing for a second before clearing his throat, “why do I feel like there’s more you haven’t told me? What else happened when you were with the League?”

Izuku shakes his head lightly in acknowledgment but doesn’t speak.

“Let’s just…” Shota shakes his head, attention lulling between everyone before settling on Izuku, “let’s just put this aside for now. We can talk more when we *know* more about the villain. We all just thought that you might like to know that more of the people who hurt you were arrested.”

“Okay, I can do that.” Izuku nods quickly, “I do appreciate it. I’m… I’m glad he’s away from the League, and that Shigaraki doesn’t have Kurogiri’s Quirk at his disposal anymore. Might making fighting him a bit easier when the time comes, huh?”

Neither of his guardians so much a crack a smile at the poor attempt at humor.

Maybe it would’ve had the desired effect if they didn’t know Izuku possessed the only Quirk that stood a match for All for One and his rising army. Izuku almost feels bad about bringing it up.

“Why does it feel like I’m missing something *again*?” Hitoshi groans, glancing around the room.

Time carries on.

Izuku doesn’t hear much more about Kurogiri or the League. He doesn’t know if things are actually calm, or if his guardians and the Heroes just aren’t telling them.

Izuku knows if it was serious, Yagi-san would tell him to be ready, or even Oboro, who Izuku knows eavesdrops a lot, would warn him that something was going down.

And Shota and Hizashi know his place in all this too, even if neither really likes the fact, he doesn’t think they’d withhold information from him if he’s truly needed. He knows he has a place in all this, and he’d known that when he accepted All Might’s Quirk.

Izuku pretends the lack of information doesn’t bother him and goes about his business— he trains hard and tries his absolute best in classes. He works with Hitoshi and his classmates and prepares for the upcoming second round of internships with everyone else. He keeps up with his sessions with Hound Dog, and even manages to find the time to visit Eri between everything else going on.

Soon, November is approaching, and with November comes Shota’s birthday.

It’s the first birthday since he started staying with his guardians that he finds out about in advance, through nothing more than Hizashi pleading that the man take the evening off from patrol so they can celebrate it together.

“It’s your birthday?” Izuku blinks in surprise, only half aware of how his guardian jolt in surprise once again. Izuku doesn’t think they should be, after all, he’d slept up in the apartment with them last night, so they knew he was around. And it is about the time he wakes up.

“We need to get you a bell or something,” Shota grumbles playfully under his breath, “don’t worry about it, Problem Child, it’s nothing. Hizashi’s just being annoying again.”

“Beg to differ!” Hizashi scowls, “let us celebrate you! You do so much, and people appreciate you. People want to celebrate your birthday! I swear if you work on *another* one of your birthdays I’m going to- to—”

“Going to what, Hizashi?” Shota drawls teasingly, turning to face his husband with a playful grin. Like he knows Hizashi has no leg to stand on in this particular argument. Like they’ve had it before. “What are you going to do if I work another birthday?”

“You’re insufferable,” Hizashi rolls his eyes, slumping in his chair. “I’ll stop touching you!”

Izuku stills, awkwardly shuffling his feet as he processes that.

What does that even mean?

He doesn’t even really want to know…

“Wo-ho,” Oboro snickers from the counter, “young ears in the room, Hizashi. Keep it in your pants or… keep it outta *Shota’s* pants.”

That’s worse. Oboro just made it worse. How does he always make it worse? Izuku feels the flush crawling up his cheeks, and he had half a mind to hide his face in his hands.

“Hizashi,” Shota scowls, a faint blush dusting his cheeks as he scowls, “the kid is right there.”

“Should I… uh, go back to my room or something?” Izuku asks, pushing down the urge to do just that and leave his guardians to argue… whatever this is. “Is this a… *private* conversation?”

“What?” Hizashi frowns, glancing between Izuku and Shota before his eyes widen and he chokes on nothing, “no, no! That’s not what I— I didn’t mean that! Well, I mean, yeah, that too, I guess; intimacy *is* touching too, but I was talking about massages! Like how you like it

when I rub your ankles and stuff, you pervert! You'll be getting no head scratches, or back rubs, or *anything* from me if you're going to be a sour old man about letting people celebrate you."

"You're older than me," Shota reminds drily. "If anyone's an old man, it's you."

"That didn't really make it much better," Oboro offers, glancing back at Izuku. The ghost snickers when he finds the teenager's cheeks lit up in a fierce blush. "Not the best at thinking before speaking, our Hizashi. Gotta love the idiot. The blush on Shota's face though—perfection!"

Izuku appreciates the way Shota is trying to ease them out of the awkwardness by redirecting the attention to something else.

He really does not want to think about any sort of intimacy between his guardians.

Nope. No thank you.

"Why do I even love you?" Hizashi groans, slumping down into arms crossed on the tabletop.

"They have this fight every year, if you can believe," Oboro tells Izuku, as if noticing the teenager's gaze dancing between his two guardians, "he never wants to celebrate, but Hizashi shows his love through celebrating and gift giving. Even back when we were kids. Yua forced Sho to pick where he wanted to go for his birthday that year we went to the cat café, and 'zashi's struggled to plan anything ever since. I mean, all they did last year, at Shota's insistence to not celebrate at all, was to have cake. Hizashi was dour for weeks afterwards. This is one of the few things their personalities actually clash over."

Izuku takes a second to mull that over before turning wide eyes onto the dark-haired man, "you don't like your birthday?"

"It's not that I don't like it," Shota shakes his head, attention lulling towards Izuku entirely, "I have nothing against my birthday, I just don't want to make a big deal. I have everything I need, and it's just another year, right? Celebrating my birthday was just never something I liked to do, even as a kid. It's too much fuss. I'd rather do something quiet; with you two and the cats."

Hizashi opens his mouth to interject, but Izuku beats him to it.

“Why… um,” Izuku glances away anxiously, aware of both guardians looking at him now, “why don’t we do something small then? I… I want to celebrate your birthday with you, like… like you guys did for me. If, I mean, you don’t have too of course! It’s your birthday and I… I think you should decide how you want to spend it but I’d… I would like to celebrate it with you, Shota. You’ve both done so much for me and I… I appreciate you both so much.”

There’s a moment of silence and then, “what do you have in mind, Kid?”

Izuku jolts in surprise, “oh, um, I was just thinking maybe we could go to the cat café again? You seemed to like it a lot when we went for my birthday, and I know you guys can’t always find the time to get off campus much anymore. I just thought it might be fun to get out for a while, but go somewhere quiet that we all liked?”

Shota mulls it over before sighing, “I don’t want to go to the arcade again. Just the café.”

“Done,” Hizashi chirps quickly before Shota even has a chance to go back on his decision, “cat café it is! Yes! Atta boy, Sunshine, you managed to talk our grumpy cat here into something I never can— oh, this’ll be so much fun. We can bring the boys out and have those delicious hot chocolates again. And they have that dark chocolate cake you love, Sweetheart! I’ll still make you cake, of course, you can never have too much cake, ya’dig? It’ll be perfect!”

“You’re way to into this,” Shota chides tiredly.

“I’m excited!” Hizashi laughs openly, “you never say yes. Especially not so easily, we’ve had this argument for *hours* some years. Our little Sunshine is a miracle worker!”

“Y’know,” Oboro grins teasingly, “Hizashi also suggested the cat café, like twenty minutes ago and Shota said no. He really is weak for you. He’s so sickeningly wrapped around your little finger— and I always thought *Hizashi* had him whipped. Ask him for a pony next, I wanna see what he says.”

Izuku shakes his head, shooting the ghost an annoyed look.

A little closer to Shota’s birthday, Yua comes by the school to break Hitoshi out for a couple hours. Hizashi, who is with the two boys when Yua signs Hitoshi out, approves for Izuku to tag along with them

and signs him out as well.

It's only after they're in the car that Izuku realizes they're going out to buy Shota gifts.

"He might seem hard to buy for," Yua tells Izuku as they walk into the store together, "but he's really a big softie. He'll like anything you pick for him, Izuku-kun. I mean, one year, Hitoshi wrapped up a rock he'd found in the garden, he couldn't have been older than three, and I kid you not, Shota kept it for years."

"Wait," Hitoshi frowns as if this is news to him, "is that why they had a rock on their coffee table for, like, my entire childhood? I don't remember giving him a rock. I always thought they were just weird dudes."

Izuku can't help but laugh. "Really?"

"Oh yeah," Yua smiles softly, "I'm sure he'd treasure anything from either of you. He has a soft spot. And, if all else fails, find him something with a cat on it. I'm getting him a tie I saw online; it's got a cat face on the end of it. He'll love it."

"He will love that," Hitoshi agrees thoughtlessly. "I don't know what I'm going to get him yet. Maybe a rock again. He liked it the first time."

"You're not cute enough to pull that off anymore," Yua snorts out.

"Rude," Hitoshi pouts as he turns back to glance over the clothing section of the store they're in as if something will draw in his attention, "coming from my own mother, but noted. I'll find something else, *I guess*." Hitoshi huffs out the 'I guess' playfully, before turning to browse the clothes again, "I wonder if they have any hoodies with cats on them. He'd love that. And maybe I'll grab the weirdo some salty licorice. That makes him happy."

"I'm gonna go look around," Izuku tells Hitoshi's mother, "I want to find something for him too."

"Alright, sweetheart," Yua nods, looking up from where she's searching through hangers of ties, "don't leave the store, okay? Shota would kill me if anything happened to you under my watch."

The store has a little bit of everything

Izuku is alone; Oboro had come with them to the store, claiming he needed to 'get off campus for a while' as if he doesn't follow Shota and Hizashi around on their patrols almost every day of the week. The ghost had wandered off within a couple minutes of the group walking into the store, so Izuku decides to pick out a gift for Shota before finding his ghost.

Izuku really has no idea what to get for Shota.

He's known the man the least amount of time of anyone here, and Izuku likes to think he knows his guardians pretty well, but at the same time, he also doesn't? He knows basics— Shota likes to sleep whenever he can, he loves cats and coffee and his sleeping bag. He loves his family, hoodies, and the colour pink, but that's not really a lot to go off.

Especially not when Hitoshi and Yua are already focused on cat things and clothing items.

Izuku knows Shota is selective about what kind of pink he adds to his wardrobe— just a pair of pink sweatpants and a pink tee-shirt Izuku had only seen him wear twice. He knows Shota is particular about his coffee, and he loves *his* sleeping bag in particular, not sleeping bags in general.

It really doesn't give him a lot to work with.

Izuku browses the aisles, gaze flicking everything there is to be seen, but nothing clicks. Nothing he sees screams Shota or makes Izuku think of the man in the slightest.

He can't imagine Shota loving anything he finds, and he wants to find something Shota will like.

He can't see Shota using anything he picks up to exam briefly, and he doesn't want to get him some surface level gift that Shota will appreciate for the sake of it coming from Izuku but will never use, or really think about again.

Izuku wants to find something perfect.

Shota has done so much for him, in class and in his personal life. He loves Shota and Hizashi dearly, but Shota had been the first one in his corner; the first to listen to him and find solutions to his problems— the first to offer aid when Izuku had needed *someone* all those months ago after being evicted from his home.

Izuku wants the man to know how much he appreciates him.

He gets more and more frustrated with each aisle he passes through. He can faintly hear Hitoshi and Yua arguing about who gets to give the man a pair of socks with cats on it but doesn't really give it much mind. He knows Shota will love the socks, even without seeing what they're talking about.

He doesn't find Oboro until he makes his way to the last section of the store. The toy aisle.

Izuku hadn't originally planned on coming this far— he's not going to find anything for his guardian in the toy aisle, but he hadn't spotted Oboro anywhere else, and this is the last spot in the store.

He knows the ghost wouldn't have left without saying anything.

"Oboro?" Izuku calls softly when he sees a head of pale blue hair standing in place, just staring into a bin of stuffed toys. "What?"

"It's perfect," the ghost breathes out, turning back to look at Izuku. "You've gotta get it for him. He'll love it. He'll *adore* it. Please. I know my best friend, and I know he'll... he'll really love it, Izuku."

Izuku steps closer, peering into the bin with the ghost.

It's not hard to tell what the ghost is talking about, and as soon as Izuku spots it, warmth fills his stomach. Oboro is right, it is perfect. It's so perfect for Shota.

"Yeah," Izuku picks up the toy, "you're right."

Shota's birthday falls on a Wednesday.

Izuku spends his time looking at the giftbox perched on his dresser leading up to the man's birthday. He's not having second thoughts about what he picked out, but he is anxious about giving a gift.

It's the first gift he's given in a long time, just because he didn't have anyone to give gifts to, or even had the time to pick something out for anyone. He's worried Shota might not like it, and he's worried it'll be weird. Everyone's told him Shota will like anything he gets, but what if they're wrong and he hates it?

It's an... out of the box sort of gift, not exactly something anyone else would pick out for Shota, but Izuku couldn't imagine giving his

guardian anything else. And he knows it's coming from both him and Oboro, so even if Izuku is nervous to give the gift, he knows he will anyways because it's from Oboro as well, even if Shota will never know that.

Izuku left that morning with his thoughts still on the blue box with pink ribbons, entirely Oboro's choosing.

Classes are the same as usual— no one but him and Hitoshi, and possibly Iida, knowing that it's Shota's birthday. None of them say anything about it, respecting the man's privacy. Izuku knows if Shota had put up so much of a fight about even acknowledging his birthday, he won't want twenty high school students bombarding him with birthday wishes.

Shota isn't any different during classes, in fact, he might even be a little harder on them during Heroics training. Izuku just smiles to himself as the man barks out directions and criticism.

When classes are finished, and everyone is returning to the dorms, Izuku and Hitoshi sneak away to their rooms to change out of their gym uniforms and to grab their gifts. Hizashi had rented a table at the café for two hours, just after dinner time, so the plan is to stop somewhere for dinner and then to head to the café for cat cuddles and dessert.

Izuku is excited.

He meets Hitoshi in the hallway, each holding their gifts for the man. Izuku clutches at his gift box, aware of the ghost lingering close behind them as they trek up the stairs to the apartment to meet up with Shota and Hizashi so everyone can leave together.

He knows Shota is going to be exasperated with the both of them— he'd explicitly told everyone not to get him anything, but Izuku knows no one had heeded the warning.

It was silly of Shota to even try and talk them out of it.

The man's eyes narrow on the gifts in their hands when he spots them sneaking into the apartment and rolls his eyes fondly. He doesn't say anything though, so Izuku takes it as a win.

Dinner is a quiet affair.

It's just Shota, Hizashi, Izuku, Hitoshi and Nemuri, who claims she's

bored without Eri at home. Apparently, Togata and the other third years are showing Eri her first movie night, which is just conveniently on the night they're going out for Shota's birthday.

Izuku just knows the woman had planned this to be able to come to Shota's birthday without overwhelming Eri with too many cats at once. Nemuri bats her eyelashes and pouts at Shota until he caves and agrees that she can come with them.

Hizashi had conveniently booked a table for five, instead of four.

Izuku snickers to himself at the slightly miffed look Shota shoots back at the blonde, who is looking anywhere but at his husband as they leave campus as a group.

They arrive at the café perfectly on time for their reservation, and Izuku is glad to see all of the cats he'd met that first time still milling around at different tables and cuddling up to other patrons.

Shota and Hizashi splurge on cat treats, ordering those before anyone has even had a chance to glance at the menu. Instantly, cats flock to their table. Despite not smiling, Shota looks incredibly happy, and content surrounded by his company and the cats.

Izuku likes seeing his guardian so happy.

Everyone's having a good time.

Izuku's cat friend from last time is back, snuggled into his lap and Shota had a grey kitten, who is a new addition to the café, playing around in his hair and padding along his shoulders. The baby paws at Shota's face and bats at stray hairs, and Shota doesn't even seem to mind.

Hitoshi is cat-less, frowning dramatically as he watches Shota in jealousy, and Hizashi is watching Shota too, just with such fondness at seeing his husband so content on his birthday. Izuku doubts it's a look on Shota that Hizashi gets to see very often.

Nemuri is chatting kindly with one of the baristas, who'd just delivered another coffee to the table for Shota, waving a feather toy around thoughtlessly, unaware of two cats stalking the toy, ready to pounce on both her and the feather toy. Izuku is waiting for that to happen.

And Oboro... Oboro looks to be having the most fun.

He's sat by the window, being stared at by three cats. He wiggles his fingers and calls out to the cats by name. Izuku wonders how much time the ghost spends here when there's nothing else to be doing. He doesn't know why he's never asked the ghost what he used to do in his spare time when both Shota and Hizashi weren't doing anything exciting enough for the ghost to tag along for.

The more he thinks about it, the more he can imagine the ghost hanging around here— cats can obviously see him, so for a lonely ghost, that's probably a blessing.

The thought makes Izuku's heart hurt.

The cats don't seem surprised by the ghost's presence, which makes Izuku believe they're probably familiar with the ghost, and a few even try to rub up against him, but go right through. They don't seem phased; they just move onto the next person offering treats or waving a cat toy around.

A small white cat in particular sits at his side, just gazing up at him.

If Izuku strains his ears, he thinks he can almost hear the cat purring. He doesn't remember seeing such a cat when they'd come here for his birthday, but the cat does look quite old, so maybe he's not a regular around here much anymore.

"I wish Nemo liked me like this," Oboro whines, hand hovering over the cat's head as if he's going to pet it. The cat tries to arch into the petting, but goes right through, obviously. The cat doesn't seem phased, tail swishing lightly behind it. "At least Fish and Blanket don't hate me."

Oboro grins fondly, despite the glint of disappointment in his gaze at not being able to pet the cat. His eyes flick up to Izuku and he smiles softly when they make eye contact, "this one's name is Cloud, fitting, isn't it? He's an old man now, but when I met him, he was just a baby. He was around that day we came here for Sho's birthday the first time. I don't know if they remember him, but I do. We bonded."

Izuku looks away sharply, petting the cat in his lap as a distraction. The cat makes a 'purrp' sort of noise at being disturbed from its sleep in his lap.

When he glances back, Oboro is cooing at the feline, and Cloud is making noises back in acknowledgement. Izuku wishes it was that easy for him to interact with ghosts— no one thinks anything of a cat

watching nothing or making noises at nothing.

But when he does it, it's considered weird.

The teen smiles softly to himself as if fingers tousle through the soft fur.

They all order a slice of cake; despite the chocolate birthday cake they have waiting at home for them. Izuku orders a slice of matcha roll cake, at Oboro's insistence, and the ghost hovers over his shoulder in stare down at the slice.

"This is torture," the ghost groans, as everyone digs into their cake. "I know I won't even be able to taste it if I did eat it. Ghost discrimination."

Izuku snorts a laugh into his bite of cake, almost choking on it.

He shoots a fleeting glare over his shoulder before taking another bite before anyone can mention it.

When everyone is finished eating, they're almost out of time in the café. Izuku mourns the fact that he'll need to wake up the kitty in his lap soon, who'd been peacefully sleeping on him nearly the entire two hours. The white cat, Cloud, had graced the table with his presence after Oboro had joined them, and was now contently sat on a smug looking Hitoshi's lap.

Hizashi insists Shota open presents in the café.

Hizashi had gotten Shota a new golden chain for his wedding ring to go onto when he couldn't wear it on his finger, and a new leather satchel. Shota seems happy enough after telling Hizashi off for spending so much money on the quality gifts.

He remembers Hizashi doing the same thing to Shota on his own birthday, so this must be a familiar dance for the two of them. Hizashi gets a thankful kiss on the cheek from Shota, which is about as much PDA as Izuku thinks he'd ever seen from Shota, and the blonde looks ecstatic at it.

Shota opens Nemuri's gift next, carefully tearing the paper with a suspicious look. Izuku doesn't see what the gift is, since the man hides it under the table before Izuku can peer over.

Hizashi glances down between his husband and the table before

letting out a full belly laugh.

Izuku and Hitoshi share a look as Oboro peers over the back of Shota's chair curiously before he lets out a prompt laugh.

"Best not inquire about this one, 'zuku," the ghost offers teasingly and Izuku knows then that he doesn't want to know what the R-rated Hero would've gotten for her school friend's birthday.

"I hope you kept the receipt for this," Shota huffs out, slipping whatever he'd just opened into the satchel, still partially wrapped.

"You're welcome," the woman teases back as she holds out another wrapped gift.

Shota glares at it, untrustingly.

"Easy tiger," Nemuri snickers, waving the gift temptingly, "this one's from Eri, not me. You're safe. She picked it out all by herself, even made you a little card too. That cutie."

Eri's present for the man is a package of two headbands. One with thin wire cat ears, and the other with a tiny little unicorn horn, fabric ears and a flower crown decorating the top. It's quite clear it was definitely picked out by a little girl.

"Wow, Eri's got style," Hitoshi snorts out, one eyebrow cocked as his eyes narrow on the unicorn headband. "If anyone can pull that off, it's definitely you, Uncle Sho."

"Don't nettle people on their birthday," the underground Hero sighs in defeat.

"I think they're cute!" Hizashi laughs, "that cat headband is so you, sweetheart. It'll be perfect for when you're marking and your hair gets in the way, ya'dig? The other one though... I dunno if it really suits ya. Kinda clashes with the all black attire you've got going on."

"Put one on," Nemuri prompts with a wide grin, pulling her phone out and aiming the camera at Shota, "c'mon, I promised little Eri I'd get a picture of you wearing the present she picked out! You don't want to hurt that poor, darling little girl's feelings, do you?"

"Not happening," Shota scoffs.

"I'll wear the unicorn one?" Izuku volunteers with a light smile, "I

think flower crowns are pretty. We can take a picture together for Eri-chan. Then you don't have to do it alone, right?"

Shota's nose scrunches up in defeat, "fine," he sighs deeply, slipping the cat ears onto his head with a sour expression, "one picture. Just for Eri. Get over here, Problem Child."

Izuku laughs as he moves to stand beside Shota, leaning on the back of the man's chair as he slips the headband on. He doesn't know what he looks like, if it looks okay, but Oboro tells him they look adorable, and Izuku can hear Hizashi cooing slightly.

Nemuri holds her phone up, shooting them a shit-eating grin that widens as soon as the flash goes off.

"Eri didn't ask for a photo, did she?" Hitoshi snickers into his hand.

"Nope!" Nemuri grins, popping the 'p' as she laughs, "but I'll certainly cherish this picture, and I'm sure she'll like it too. I'm thinking about framing it, actually! My dear, dear Shota and one of my cutie-pie nephews. This is also, totally, blackmail material."

"Oh!" Hizashi smiles lightly, leaning into Nemuri's space to see the picture she'd taken, "send me a copy of it too! They're my boys, after all. We can put it up in the living room, eh, Shota? We have so few pictures of our Sunshine!"

"I don't like any of you," Shota sighs heavily, though his lips do twitch up faintly in a smile. "Alright, what's left to open, let's get this over with so I can take what's left of my dignity and go home."

He opens Hitoshi's gifts next— the sweatshirt Hitoshi had picked out and a couple packages of salty licorice, as well as the gift from Yua and Hitoshi's father. Shota snickers at the tie and socks, and stares fondly at a hoodie, that Izuku only now realizes is completely black with tiny triangle cat ears sewn into either side of the hood.

When it comes to Izuku's turn, the teen hesitates.

Anxiety swirls in his chest as he clutches the box to his chest.

"Um," Izuku swallows roughly, taking comfort in Oboro leaning on the back of his chair as he finally hands the box over to Shota, "I wasn't sure what to get you... So, I, um, I hope you like it?"

"You didn't have to get me anything," Shota reminds softly, "but I

appreciate it, Kiddo. Thank you."

"Open it!" Oboro prompts, going unheard as usual. The ghost is bouncing on the on the balls of his feet like an overexcited toddler, "I can't wait to see the look on his face. He's going to loveee it!"

Shota carefully pulls one end of the ribbon, and the neat bow comes undone. He doesn't bother waiting as he tugs the lid off and stares down into the box for a long second.

He doesn't say anything and Izuku's heart sinks into his stomach.

Gently, Shota reaches into the box and tugs out the stuffed cat that Izuku and Oboro had found. Izuku knows it's impossibly soft to the touch, and just your average sized plush toy; not too big and not too small.

That's not what had drawn Izuku's attention to it though.

Hizashi inhales in surprise through his nose, and even Nemuri makes a breathless sort of noise.

"I just," Izuku forces out without looking up, fiddling with his fingers anxiously, "I liked the colour and I thought... I thought you might too."

The cat is the exact same colour as Oboro's hair. That shade of blue that you don't see often; a beautiful shade of blue. The whole bin had been filled with strangely coloured animals— a lime green dog, a purple elephant, a pink lion, a red rabbit... and a pale blue cat. And if that wasn't perfect enough, the glass eyes on the cat were so close to the green of Izuku's own eyes that it had felt like fate to find such a gift.

Something from both Izuku and Oboro for their friend and guardian.

Honestly, even if it didn't have green eyes, Izuku still would've gotten it. He'd never seen a stuffed cat in such a colour, but it really was cute. And he hopes it would remind Shota of his lost friend who's still very much a part of his life.

And it had come from Oboro as well. Shota might not know that, but Izuku does.

"I hope it's not weird," Izuku forces out, still without looking up, "I don't know, I know it's childish but I just, I *saw* it and I... I thought of

you?”

Shota still doesn’t say anything, though he does draw in a shaky breath, eye not looking away from the cat. Izuku sorta wants the ground to split open and swallow him whole, anxiety only getting worse the longer Shota doesn’t say anything.

“Um,” Izuku swallows nervously as Shota stares down at the cat plushie, “I... I just thought you’d like it, you know? I saw it and... and nothing else really stood out, but when I saw that I just... an-and, w-well, you, uhm, you picked out my cat and I love it so much and I just... it’s just... it’s cute? I’m sorry if—”

“It is cute,” Shota croaks out, eyes lifting from the green glass eyes on the cat stuffed toy. His fingers ruffle through the fine, soft fur and Shota strokes one thumb over one of the feline’s glass eyes, before tightening his hold on it, almost desperately. “It’s so unique. Very *blue*. Looks just like... but with your... I love it, Izuku.”

“It’s adorable,” Hizashi adds, voice soft and almost watery as he leans into Shota to inspect the toy closer. “I love this colour of blue.”

Shota lets out a soft laugh, thumbing at the cat’s ear, “yeah, me too. Thank you, Izuku. Really. I love it.”

Izuku bows his head in embarrassment, reveling in the fact that Shota loves it.

“I told you it was perfect!” Oboro chimes in with a squinty grin, “I know that idiot better than anyone, and you’n’me, Pal, we’re two of his soft spots. Put us together and mix in a little bit of cat for the cat lover, and you've got the absolute perfect gift!”

“Looks like ‘zuku wins the gift giving contest,” Hitoshi had leaned over towards Nemuri, whispering loudly. “I knew I should’ve gone for a rock again. Last time I listen to my mom.”

“I don’t know,” Nemuri snorts, stage whispering back, “my gift was pretty risqué I’m sure your uncles will—”

“If you finish that sentence with my kids at this table, I will stab you with this butter knife.”

“Yeah,” Nemuri pouts dramatically, hands rising in surrender, “green-bean wins. Definitely.”

They leave shortly after, Izuku and Shota being the last two to trail out the door.

Everyone had grabbed some of Shota's presents to help carry out to the car, but Shota had kept a hold of the cat stuffy. Izuku can't help but smile when he notices it.

Oboro is over saying goodbye to some of the cats, mainly Cloud, when Shota wraps Izuku in a half-hug.

"Thank you," the man says quietly, "it's so perfectly *you*, Izuku, I love it. And it... reminds me of a friend too, who I... think could use more people thinking of him. It's one of the best gifts I've ever received." The man pauses, then grimaces lightly, "don't tell Hizashi I said that."

"I won't," Izuku smiles, returning the hug, "happy birthday, Shota. I hope it wasn't as awful as you thought it was going to be."

"Brat," the man laughs lightly, finally pulling away, "it's one of the best birthdays I've had in a while."

Pride settles in Izuku's stomach as he squeezes his guardian a little tighter.

Shota let's out a breathy laugh, "hey, what do you say we make more of an effort to come around here? I... avoided this place for a while but I remember how much I loved it now. With you, and 'zashi and Hitoshi. Especially if Cloud is back. He had some health problems for a while there and he was taken off the floor."

Izuku cocks his head in interest as to what Shota is going to say, "Cloud is the white cat, isn't he?"

"Yeah," Shota's lips quirk up faintly, "You know... Oboro... he adored Cloud; right from the second they met. After we lost him... it always feels like he was around whenever we'd come here, and Cloud always reminded me of him too. Maybe that's why I stopped wanting to come around but... I think it's time to remember him and not mourn him. You're a lot like him, you know?"

There's a sentimental glint in Shota's eyes as he glances back at the white feline, who is watching Oboro. Izuku offers a crooked smile when Oboro grins in their direction and waves wildly.

"Anyways," Shota huffs softly, "enough being sentimental. Now, we've gotta head out, before Hizashi comes in to drag us out. Let's go,

Problem Child, everyone's waiting."

Oboro joins Izuku as his side, "what was that about?"

Izuku shakes his head slightly, "nothing much. C'mon, he's head out."

Izuku doesn't see the stuffed toy again, not until the following Saturday where he and Hitoshi head up to the apartment for dinner with Shota and Hizashi as usual.

And there, on the shelf beside the photo of Oboro, Shota and Hizashi, sits the blue stuffed cat, as well as a newly framed photo of Izuku and Shota wearing those headbands.

Warmth fills Izuku's chest as he makes his way to the chaos of the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

I think Shota needed a birthday as well, since everyone else of the main cast got mention except for him :(I also really loved writing Shota's birthday. Those cuties! We all needed some fluff, I think. Now, things are in the works though, and I'm super excited! The end is near, friends.

Also, I saw some people asking about the war arc, but I truthfully haven't seen that still. I know basics, but I want to remain blissfully unaware for a while longer, so I won't be writing that. It was never my intention to go any further then season 5 with this fic, so apologies if you guys were expecting that! Hopefully you'll still stick around for the end anyways!

I hope to get the next chapter out soon, but I can't make any promises! Still, I appreciate you all, and I'm so thankful you're sticking around and still liking this fic! As always, comments are greatly appreciated; I love hearing from you guys! <3

Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

> Hello! I'm back again :) Just as a bit of a warning, I played around with the canon events again because it made more sense for something I wanted to do! It's not really much of a change, but it is a change! Also, first bit of the chapter is just clearing up some loose ends, but it gets fun after that.
>
> Now! I have more fun things to share with you guys! First off, the lovely Hurricanekat98 has been recording and posting this fic as a podfic! Kat has done a fantastic job and here's the link to the playlist if anyone is interested in checking it out! I've listened to every chapter :D
>
> And secondly, we've also gotten some more fanart! Both are based on the last chapter, and I was secretly hoping people would want to draw some of the birthday stuff! The first piece of art is by Uncertified here on ao3 and smartbutuncertified on Tumblr! It is the absolute cutest drawing of the cat plush, and it was exactly what I was picturing! The second piece of art is by Valonxs18x on ao3 and valonxs on Tumblr! A cute drawing of Shota and Izuku with the headbands! So cute! Thank you both! And for the final piece of art, we've got another TikTok! It's a super cute video of Izuku and Oboro meeting done by @cloudyghostspace! Thanks to everyone who likes this fic enough to make art for it, and please give the artists some appreciation if you're willing to! :D
>
> Now, without further ado~ please enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of November passes by surprisingly fast.

Izuku studies hard for the tests he knows will come before the Christmas break, and he works hard with his new Quirk. It’s easier learning when he has more people to offer suggestions.

When it’s not just Izuku and Oboro bouncing ideas back and forth.

For a while, it had been just Izuku and Oboro, and All Might, Izuku supposes, but once the school year actually started and Yagi-san had needed to spread himself thinner between teaching a bunch of classes, trying to focus on Izuku and One for All, all while still keeping face as

Japan's Number One Hero, he didn't have as much time.

They'd made do. Izuku has always managed to make do, but he can't lie and say it's not easier. That he's not picking things up faster with help and making bounds and leaps with the Quirk when he'd only really been managing baby steps alone.

Now Izuku has Oboro, Shota, Hizashi and Yagi-san.

When he can't get something right— when Blackwhip digs into fears he knows he harbors despite the Quirk running on his emotions, he has more people helping him process. He has more people to bounce ideas off, even when Izuku doesn't really explain what has him so scared.

It really sucks that the first Quirk he manifests is one that will go haywire over secrets he'd kept so close to his chest for so long. Seeing ghosts had always been a fear he'd had nestled in the back of his mind. Not in the traditional sense that *ghosts were scary*— that wasn't Izuku's problem. Being different was what scared him. Being so different that it chased people away.

And it's not even a fear he can tell anyone besides. Not really.

He can't tell Shota or Hizashi, or even Hound Dog what the true problem is when it comes to his lack of control of the new Quirk, because that would mean outing himself. That would mean risking throwing everything he'd gotten along the way, everything he'd tried *so hard* not to become attached to, away.

Izuku thinks that plays a role in all this too.

When he's training with Shota, or Hizashi, he lets his mind wonder.

When he finds himself thinking about telling them this secret and them not reacting well, or even having them figure it out themselves. When he thinks of them packing up without a word like his mother, or, worse, *saying things* and *kicking him out*. He isn't sure he'd be able to handle that. Isn't sure he could keep going.

And whenever he lets himself think like that, lets his heart twist in his chest as the emotions threaten to consume him, Blackwhip takes control and Izuku's left reeling from that.

And the worst part is, Izuku isn't even sure how to explain this to everyone.

He knows they can see him struggling, and it's not like he's ever overly emotional or anything. He's not quick to anger, especially not in class or when he's training with his guardians, so how do you tell someone you're constantly *terrified* that universe is going to tug the rug out from under you? How do you admit to this fear, but not explain said fear?

It's not like Izuku doesn't have a right to be worried. It's happened once, it can happen again. He genuinely expects it to happen again, he knows that history repeats itself and this is... this is him being weird and different, and people don't want to be a part of that when they know.

And Shota and Hizashi are just so clever.

He knows they watch him, that they try to understand him. He's never had anyone so invested in him; they're so kind and in tune with everything Izuku does, and he doesn't really understand it.

He knows they try so hard, but he just... he can't.

He's failed miserably at keeping them at arm's length, but it's still the safest way for him to live. You can't get hurt in the end if you don't expect anything to begin with.

The problem is, he likes being here with them.

He likes this normalcy; he likes having adults, *parents*, who want to be active parts of his life. Adults who ask him how his day has been, and who chide him when he forgets to eat meals, or who invite him to watch movies, or have dinner, or just hang out with them.

He'd spent so much time alone before he'd enrolled at Yuuei. He'd grown up alone, he'd done things alone, and he didn't let it bother him. It's not like he had much to compare his life to, after all.

He never would've thought it would be so easy to get used to this, but now he has and now he's worried. He's scared that it'll come to an end.

He's scared of what'll happen to him if he makes any wrong move.

He's walking on eggshells because he knows one wrong move from him could dislodge everything he'd gotten so used to. He doesn't want that to happen, but at the same time, he's been waiting for the other shoe to drop since Shota and Hizashi had signed all that foster

paperwork.

And he knows this fear is what's making mastering Blackwhip so hard. He knows this is holding him back from what he could be if he could only manage to put a little bit more trust in somewhere and confessed to all these secrets and doubts— the fear that has followed him around his whole life.

He's so scared now because he has something he doesn't want to lose.

He has *people* he doesn't want to lose.

It's probably one of his worst training sessions with the Quirk since that traumatic manifestation during class. Izuku can't seem to control his emotions— that fear settling in his chest and Blackwhip takes full advantage of it.

Shota hasn't ever had to use his Quirk on Izuku like this.

Blackwhip is just so powerful, and Izuku is struggling to not only control it, but to keep it contained.

And what's stirring up all these emotions? Making everything so messy?

His mother.

It all comes back to mom.

Shota and Hizashi had approached Izuku about his mother the night prior.

It was Saturday evening, and Izuku and some of his peers had just finished a study session to prepare for those upcoming pre-holiday tests they know are coming. The text was simple; just Shota requesting Izuku's presence upstairs to discuss something important.

And that, of course, had settled in his stomach like a rock.

"It's nothing bad," Oboro had trailed after Izuku, joining him in his dorm room so Izuku could put his school supplies away before sneaking up the stairs to the apartment. "I'm sure of it."

"How would you know?" Izuku mutters as he sets his English homework down on the desk, "it's not like you were upstairs eavesdropping. It could be anything— I mean, I haven't done anything

wrong, have I? What is there that they could be upset over? I've kept my grades up, and I haven't done anything in class. My Quirk control is... well, it's *okay*. I can't think of anything."

"They never said anything about being upset," Oboro reminds with a furrowed brow. "This whole jumping to a you're in trouble thing that you've got going on is a bit ridiculous. You're a great kid, and you're definitely reading into this too much. It'll be fine. You haven't done anything wrong, and there's, like, nothing for them to be upset about."

"Maybe you're not reading into it enough," Izuku squints at the ghost. "I know this doesn't affect you in the slightest, but it does affect me. Nothing good ever comes from your guardian saying something is *important*."

Oboro's lips jut out as he pouts, "okay, okay," he relents, "that's fair. Still, at least hear them out before going off the handle with worry. You know they love you, and we both know they could consider *anything* important. Who knows, maybe we're getting a puppy?"

"Shota hates dogs," Izuku snorts back as he finally turns away from the desk. "If anything, we'd be getting another cat, and I don't think Hizashi is on board with us being outnumbered by felines."

"A dog would be so much more fun," Oboro pouts. "I'd get a dog. If, y'know, I wasn't a ghost and all. Cats are cool and all, but dogs are much more fun! They aren't man's best friend for nothing!"

"Shota would beg to differ," Izuku snickers.

"Yeah, well, he's *boring*, and so are his rotten spoiled brats of cats," Oboro bemoans, shoulders slumping, "and he's not here to add his praises on cats anyways, so his say doesn't even count. Let a ghost dream a little, you party-pooper. Let me have a dog!"

"You're just mad Nemo doesn't like you."

"I've been nothing but nice to that cat!" Oboro cries out, "and all she does is avoid me like I'm some sort of plague and hiss at me. Hiss at me! Can you believe that? No sympathy for the ghost. Cats are cruel creatures; or Nemo is, at least."

Izuku lets out a quiet laugh as he eyes the cat before his thoughts drift back to where he's going. He catches his bottom lip between his teeth, worrying it slightly before sighing, "alright, enough whining about pets. C'mon. Let's face this before they come looking for me."

“That’s the spirit!” Oboro cheers, hopping up off the bed to follow Izuku out the door, “this discussion isn’t over though, I’m definitely going to be enlisting you to try and talk our mean old grumpy Shota into adopting a dog. He can’t say no to you!”

“He’s not mean or old,” Izuku snorts out. “Aren’t you older than him? What does that make you?”

“Invalid argument, I am a ghost,” Oboro grins. “Besides, I look impossibly good for thirty-one, don’t I?”

Izuku shakes his head as he heads towards the stairs with a ghost as a shadow following every step of the way.

He really hadn’t expected his guardians to mention his mother.

He’d… well, as awful as it was to admit, he’d been trying to force himself to forget that anything had even happened. To pretend to be blissfully unaware of everything happening around him when it involved his lack of parents. It was easier to pretend it hadn’t happened, than to try to process a parent leaving without a word.

He still loved his mom, he thinks he always will, because for fifteen years she had been the only person he’d really had, even if he’s not sure he ever really did have her. She might’ve been distant, but she was still there. She still provided for him and raised him.

Despite everything, she had stayed with him for as long as she had.

He knows he and his guardians have very different views on Izuku’s relationship with his mother, but at the end of the day, he doesn’t think he could ever hate her. She might not want him in her life and maybe… maybe he’d better off without his mother in his life too, but she’s still his mom, and she always will be. No matter what.

Still, as soon as she’s mentioned, Izuku’s heart freezes in his chest.

“She’s… going back to America?”

He knows his tone is icy, disbelieving. It makes sense, he thinks. That’s where she’d been. That’s where Auntie had said she was living, where she’d fled to. She’d gone to be with Izuku’s father, who he hadn’t even spoken to since he was diagnosed Quirkless.

She doesn’t want to be in Japan, and that thought alone makes Izuku’s stomach turn sour.

“Do you...” Hizashi hesitates for a second, “do you not want that, sunshine?”

“It’s not that I...” Izuku swallows down the emotion, “d-does *she* want that?”

“She requested it.” Shota fills in quietly, soft gaze taking Izuku in as he continues, “your mother applied for and was approved for American citizenship. She was arrested in America and even though she was brought back to Japan to be charged for her crimes, she’s requested to live out her sentence in the United States. We have no right to keep her here, and honestly, I don’t even really think we had a right to bring her back. The lines get blurry when it comes to stuff like this; especially when important people are involved.”

Izuku sucks in a breath as he looks up towards his guardian, “Yagi-san?”

“He’s the one,” Shota nods stiffly. “His involvement made things a little messy, but it’s being sorted out. Your mother though... she’s set to be flying out later this week. I’m sorry, kid.”

“No,” Izuku forces out, offering a light laugh that he thinks might sound defeat by the way both guardians wilt. “Don’t be sorry. It’s... It’s okay, I mean... I knew she didn’t... I just... I want her to be happy, you know? Did she... seem happy? When you met her?”

“I didn’t care to notice,” Shota frowns honestly. “I was a little pissed off knowing what she did to you. But... if you really want to know... yeah, Kid, she said she was happy in America. With your dad.”

“Then I’m glad,” Izuku decides slowly.

He offers them a weak smile that he knows doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Maybe she’ll finally be happy now. I don’t know if she ever truly has been, you know? I know it was hard raising me, and I know you guys see things differently, but she did her best, I think. I want her to be happy, even if that means I never see her again. If she...” Izuku swallows, wiping his eyes as emotion curls his tone, “if she needs to give me up to be happy, I think it’s probably best. I don’t want to force someone to be a part of my life if they don’t want to and... maybe... maybe this is what’s best for both of us, you know?”

“It’s okay to cry, Sunshine,” Hizashi offers softly, setting his hand on Izuku's knee.

Izuku laughs instead, wiping his eyes again. “So, she really signed the paperwork then? She’s not… *legally* my mom anymore? I mean, it doesn’t really make much of a difference, right? She hasn’t been my mom for… a long time. It’s just. It’s official now, isn’t it?”

“She did,” Shota’s tone is hard to read. “It’s official. But you’ll stay with us until something more permanent gets approved. You don’t have to worry about any of this though, okay? Just focus on school and that Quirk of yours— those internships are coming up, keep your mind on that, alright? You’re not going to be going anywhere anytime soon.”

“Okay,” Izuku breathes out, “I… I’ll try.”

“We only bring this up,” Hizashi sets his hand on Izuku’s knee, “because this might be the last time, you’ll see your mother. She’s agreed to see you, but it’s all on you, Kiddo. If you don’t want to, that’s fine. If you do want to, that’s cool too. The ball is in your court, Sunshine. Just say the word and we’ll make it happen.”

“I don’t.”

Izuku is almost surprised at how fast he answers. He speaks so fast that he’d very nearly cut Hizashi off. He hadn’t even really taken a second to process his own words before speaking. The response is automatic, as fear and anxiety clench in his stomach at just the thought.

He just… he really doesn’t want to see her.

He doesn’t want to say goodbye.

He doesn’t want to go there and see this woman, his mother, and watch her leave.

He doesn’t want to hear her say why she left, doesn’t want to hear anything from her point of view because he knows what she’s going to say already. He’d known his entire life, and it’s not like she’d ever made an effort to hide her distaste towards him. He already knows.

There’s nothing about this that he doesn’t know— no unanswered questions, he doesn’t need closure, or to see her and be reminded of everything he’d had. And he doesn’t want to make a big deal out of this. He doesn’t think he could handle that anyways.

He hates that she’d left. He hates it with his entire being— that

festering kind of anger that coils in your stomach and makes your vision blurry. He's just so mad that she'd done this to him. That she'd left without him, without a word.

He thinks he always will.

He hates that they were at a point where he hadn't even noticed right away. He hates that he hadn't had anything of her besides that stupid note, but he also knows he wouldn't have wanted to say goodbye. Wouldn't have wanted to watch her pack her things and leave, knowing nothing he could say, or do, would change her mind.

He wasn't the child she'd always dreamed of having.

He was the child she'd gotten stuck with.

She'd already made the decision that she didn't want to be a part of his life. That was her right, he thinks. She'd signed away rights to him, and he officially, *legally*, didn't have a mother anymore.

He hates this, but he also knew it was coming.

He'd long ago accepted that his mother didn't want him.

He'd been living in a state of limbo, and he was finally seeing a light at the end of a tunnel. A definitive answer. Maybe not a particularly good one, but still an answer.

She doesn't want him, and he refuses to force her to stick around if she wants to go. She'd already left once; it was obvious she didn't want to be around him anymore. There's nothing left for him to hold onto anymore, this is the end of the relationship he'd had with his mom.

He really doesn't want to put himself in the position to be upset when nothing he says or does will change anything. He's not blind, and he's not dumb either. He understands this the best of anyone.

She'd left for a reason.

She left because of him.

"I really, *really* don't," Izuku admits a little louder, distantly aware of the watery curl to his tone. Izuku sniffles, palming at his eyes. He's surprised to find moisture on his palms when he pulls his hands back. "Please don't make me..."

“Then you won’t,” Shota assures softly, setting his hand on Izuku’s head and brushing his bangs out of his face. “We won’t ever make you do anything you don’t want to do. There’s no right or wrong answer. We just wanted to give you the option before she’s gone.”

Hizashi turns sideways to wrap Izuku in a hug, and the boy melts into the embrace instantly. He buries his nose in Hizashi’s shoulder, only half aware of Shota slipping away with his phone in his hand, probably going to update Tsukauchi.

Izuku just buries his face further into Hizashi’s shoulder.

The last couple classes before winter break are busy.

Everyone is excited about the apprenticeships they’re all going to for a week over the winter break. Izuku is stoked to be working with Endeavor, even more so now that he’ll be doing it with Todoroki and Kacchan who’d both gotten their provisional licenses.

Izuku had thought about trying to go back to Nighteye Agency and working more on that split internship that Shota had managed to arrange for him again, but with Nighteye Agency still trying to recover from losing Sir Nighteye, he hadn’t thought it would be the best idea. From what he’d heard from Togata, they’d cut back on the interns they were taking, and everything was still a mess.

And as much as he’d been excited to work at Hizashi’s Agency and learn under his guardian, he’d decided that maybe he wouldn’t get exactly what he needed. It had been a panic placement, and he was still so grateful for Hizashi even considering taking him so late, but it hadn’t been a first choice.

He already had both Shota and Hizashi working with him on the new Quirk, and when the option of being an apprentice at the recent Number One Hero’s agency arose, Izuku knew he couldn’t pass on the offer. Endeavor is also someone he thinks he could learn a lot from, and with him already getting extra help from his guardians and learning from them in that sense, he’d wanted to get all the help and learning experience he can.

It’s the last day of classes when something odd happens.

Iida is up front talking about expectations for the apprenticeships, Yaoyorozu stood at his side nodding along in agreement. Their class president directs them to grab their Hero costume cases and head to

Ground Alpha for the day's classes.

Shota pushes the door open just as everyone is heading to the door, cases in hand.

It's the announcement of Principal Nezu's voice that first strikes Izuku as odd.

"Aizawa-san, please report to the staff room immediately."

Izuku blinks down at his backpack, where he'd been tucking away his journal for safe keeping while he was busy with his class, before his gaze jumps over to Shota whose brow is furrowed in confusion as he glances in the direction of the staff room.

The class doesn't seem phased by the request, it's not like it's overly weird, all of them just slipping out of the room past Shota until it's just Izuku, Shota and Oboro remaining.

Izuku hesitates as Shota's gaze finally flicks back to him. Shota scans the room quickly, like he's checking for any other lingering students before his eyes are on Izuku, one eyebrow arching at the teen lingering.

"Are you in trouble?" Izuku asks curiously as he scans Shota.

He'd never heard any of the teacher's requested to report to Nezu-san — not during school hours, at least. Izuku knows the rodent tends to text his staff if he'd like to see them, so this is a bit surprising. Shota seems surprised too.

The underground Hero looks confused as he shrugs the shoulder of the arm not clutching at his sleeping bag. "God, I hope not," the man replies drily, looking down the hall once again. "I shouldn't keep the rat waiting, and you shouldn't be late to class. Pitter-patter, kid, off you go."

"R-right!" Izuku nods sharply, clutching his costume case to his chest as he scurries across the floor. He slips out past his guardian with more ease than any of his classmates, brushing against the man as he goes. "Um, good luck? W-with, um, principal Nezu. I hope you're not in trouble or anything."

Shota's lips quirk up faintly in a smile as he bows his head, "thanks kid," he huffs, ruffling Izuku's hair with his spare hand, "I might actually need that."

Izuku bows his head in a nod, finally heading down the hallway. He only makes it a couple steps before he's throwing a quick glance back that shows Shota heading the opposite direction towards the staff room. Izuku can't help but wonder what's going on.

He feels a presence settle at his side before he sees it.

"Not going with Shota?"

The ghost hums in acknowledgement, "doesn't sound like much fun. Although... I do like seeing him get in trouble. He, like, never got into trouble when we were in school. Almost a good-two shoes that quiet, grouchy transfer. I'm sure he was Nezu's favorite student. Nezu likes the underdogs. And Shota was about as underdog as you could get with his temperament and Quirk."

It's Izuku's turn to hum.

That does sound like something Nezu would be interested in. Placing bets on those the world doesn't expect much from, when he sees something completely different. Nezu-sensei seems like the type to like to win, especially when the odds are not in his favor.

It's like how Yagi-san had selected Izuku to inherit One for All.

"That didn't really answer my question," Izuku hums out under his breath. "You don't want to go listen in? I thought you lived for the gossip. Must be something good, huh?"

"Well," Oboro puckers his lips thoughtfully, "I mean, yeah, I could follow Sho as a silent shadow he doesn't even know exists, *or* I could watch you do super cool Hero training in Ground Alpha, where there's a chance you might give me the time of day and actually talk to me?" each of Oboro's hands lift like he's a scale weighing the two options before his grin sharpens.

"Yeah," he snickers as if the answer is obvious, "I think I'll hang back with you. Besides, who knows how long he'll be caught up talking to the rat. I'm sure whatever he gets up to I'll hear about later when he tells Hizashi. I swear, Shota and Hizashi talk through everything. They're such boring adults now. I thought they were bad as students, bickering like an old married couple, and now they *are* an old married couple and it's worse. Disgustingly domestic."

"Eavesdropper," Izuku mutters under his breath as he hurries after his classmates to change into his costume. "Just try not to distract me,

alright? It's already hard enough keeping Blackwhip and One for All under control."

"Roger that!" Oboro lets out a loud laugh as he heads straight for the gym, offering a playful salute as he faces Izuku, walking backwards in the direction of the gym. Izuku smiles to himself as he pushes open the door to the boy's locker room. It's a little funny that Oboro still doesn't ever follow him into the locker room.

They talk about Quirks in the locker rooms, and Izuku is more than happy to talk about Blackwhip with his curious classmates. They haven't seen him using the Quirk since Shota had wanted him to get a hold of the Quirk without putting his classmates at risk like he had during the training exercise when it had manifested.

He's a lot more comfortable with it, but it's still harder to control. His secrets are starting to catch up to him and the fear of everything makes his control not perfect, but with any luck he'll get better during his apprenticeship and working with his guardians and mentor over the holidays.

They have a couple weeks off, and only one week of that is internships.

Izuku is not surprised to find All Might waiting at Ground Alpha. Oboro is stood just behind the former Number One Hero, peering over his shoulder at whatever he's mixing. He looks up when the students get close enough to notice, waving brightly at Izuku as he joins the teen at his side.

Izuku frowns to himself, gaze casting around to see if he can see Shota anywhere. It's not like him to be late, and he's supposed to be joining them, isn't he?

"Hey, hang on a second," Kaminari is the one to speak, nose wrinkled as he scans around before his scrutinizing gaze falls on Yagi-san, "where's Aizawa-Sensei?"

"He... ah," the Pro shoots Izuku a quick look and something about that, in and of itself, makes something coil unpleasantly in Izuku's stomach, "an urgent matter arose, so he had to leave school and take care of it immediately. Aizawa will not be joining us for training this afternoon."

He had to... leave school? An *urgent* matter?

Shota left campus in the middle of the school day?

That's... weird.

It must really be something important then.

Izuku takes a second to process that, gaze flicking over to Hitoshi first, who looks just as confused, before his gaze flicks back to Oboro, whose brow is furrowed thoughtfully. He glances down at Izuku, a crooked smile lifting onto his lips as if to dispel any worry.

It... doesn't really help. Anxiety swirls in Izuku's chest.

The ghost seems to realize this, as he wilts. "I... clearly chose wrong, didn't I?"

Izuku tips his head in a subtle nod.

"I'm going to go check up on Hizashi," Oboro says after a second. All Might is talking about class now, having expertly transitioned away from Shota's absence, as weird as it was, and onto what they'll be doing. "Maybe he knows something, yeah? I can snoop. You just... focus on All Might. I mean, class. Training. You know what I mean. Do great things, yeah? Be the master of that ghost Quirk— I'll be *right* back."

Izuku blinks owlishly in response, and when he opens his eyes, he's suddenly alone. The ghost has quite literally blinked out of existence. Izuku turns slowly to where his classmates are warming up and joins them quietly, without drawing any attention to himself. He settles beside Hitoshi.

"Did Sho tell you anything about what all this is about?" Hitoshi had leaned over to whisper. "I mean, this is weird, even for him."

Izuku shakes his head numbly, a frown pulling at his lips.

"Huh," Hitoshi hums. "I'm sure it's nothing. Probably just the police needing him for something. Maybe he was called out for a mission? I mean, he's got lots of other responsibilities besides us, and it's gotta be something cool if Nezu sent him out, right?"

Izuku thoughtfully turns that over in his head a couple times, saying nothing.

"Okay, bad news," Oboro is suddenly at Izuku's side, and the teen

actually startles. He whips around to glare at the ghost, who only offers a sheepish wince. “Ah, sorry. Anyways, uh, Hizashi is gone too. Nemuri is watching over his second-year class, which is definitely a panic placement. Whatever this is about, it means they’re both a part of it. I even checked the garage downstairs, and the car is gone too, so they didn’t take one of the Yuuei vehicles. That means it’s nothing to do with the school. I have no idea what’s up.”

Izuku worries his bottom lip as he hurries to trail after Hitoshi, Oboro falling into step with him.

It must be something big then.

If Oboro has no idea what’s happening, has no idea where they are, they’re going to be stuck in the dark until someone explains. Izuku knows the ghost can’t just magically track people— he hadn’t been able to find Izuku when he’d been kidnapped. So, they’re not going to be getting any answers right now, are they?

“I’m sure everything will be fine,” Oboro says softly, “they’re big boys, they can handle themselves, right? Who knows, maybe Nezu sent them on a errand or something. Just... focus on class. Don’t be worried; that’ll affect Blackwhip, won’t it?”

“I can’t just *stop* being worried,” Izuku snorts under his breath, shooting the ghost a light glare.

“Just try,” Oboro snorts out. “Might wanna catch up with everyone else, I think the class is being sorted into teams without ya. Hurry before you end up on Kacchan’s team~”

Izuku jolts to attention, hurrying to join his peers as Yagi-san groups them up.

Class goes by smoothly after that. Izuku tries not to think about his guardians, and he even manages to keep Blackwhip under control, which is a bit hard considering how anxious he is about his guardians leaving for some unknown reason in the middle of the school day.

It’s very not like either of them.

He keeps a tab on Oboro, too, who is watching from the sidelines with All Might until...

Well, one second, he’s there, and the next he’s gone.

Oboro typically tells him if he's going anywhere, but Izuku assumes he's just going to check on the staff room and Shota and Hizashi's classrooms in case they're back. Oboro likes to keep tabs on everyone too.

The ghost doesn't return.

Izuku doesn't think anything of it.

Oboro tries not to feel worried as he pops up around the school in search of his friends. Shota is not in the staff room anymore, and a quick look in Hizashi's English classroom confirms he's not in either.

He pops down to the garage, heart pounding in his chest when he spots the empty parting space that the car had been in that morning.

Something doesn't feel right.

Oboro curses himself for not following Shota when he'd been called to the staff room. Of course, the one time he forgoes sticking around for boring talks, it's the one time something interesting happens. He feels like an idiot— something was obviously going down now, and he had no idea what. There's no way to know what was happening. They were just gone, and Oboro can't change that, or magically locate them.

Being a ghost didn't work like that.

So, he makes his way back to Ground Alpha where 1-A is still warming up.

He does his best to calm Izuku down but knows the green-haired teen is still worried. Oboro can't blame him, he's worried too. This isn't normal. Nothing like this has ever happened, not that he'd going to tell the already panicking teenager that.

Izuku should focus on class.

He hangs back and lets Izuku work with his classmates. Doesn't bother or disturb him. He thinks Izuku might already have enough on his mind, and Oboro doesn't want to add anything more.

Oboro sighs to himself, eyes trailing after the green-haired kid and then—

And then something happens.

He doesn't know what happened.

He's just gone.

He'd been there, watching the class quietly, and now he was... where was he?

It feels weird— in a foreign sort of way. Familiar, yet weird. Different to what he's known since dying. Panic swells in his chest as he tries to make sense of what he's feeling, what he's witnessing. It's like he can't see clearly, vision obstructed by a wall of purple.

He tries to move but... he can't. He's stuck. He can't move and the feeling sends a jolt of panic through his body because he's a ghost; ghost can't be caught. He's never felt like this, never felt trapped.

His panic ticks upwards, even as he tries to calm himself down. His heart pounds in his chest and he... can he *feel* it? That's not... What the hell is happening? He's never felt like this before never—

Hang on...

Is that...

Shota, he wants to say as soon as he realizes his friend is there— the words sitting on the tip of his tongue, but he can't seem to make his mouth twist. He's never had a problem with that before. He glances hurriedly over a bit to the other person facing him, *Hizashi*.

You're both here.

They're there.

His friends are right in front of him and is... is that glass? Why is there a glass wall between them? Why is there a wall between them? Why is he on one side, and they're on the other? This isn't right. Why can't he move? Why isn't he over there with them?

Oboro tried to calm the raging of his heart, hearing nothing but static in his ears. He squints through the haze clouding his vision, squints at his friends until he can make them out through the rush of everything he hasn't felt in... in *thirteen years*.

Why do they... why do they look so sad? Is Shota... is he crying? They're... yelling at him. They're yelling, but they can't... he's a ghost, so what the hell are they yelling at?

Why are they so upset?

What happened?

Why is he *here*?

Oboro wants to cry.

There's just so much he feels.

Emotions and feelings he hasn't felt since before he... before...

But that can't be.

That doesn't make any sense.

This doesn't make any sense.

Oboro lets his gaze flick down, and it's about all he can manage to do. He's... he's restrained. He gives a feeble attempt at tugging on his arms, but they don't move. He shouldn't feel like this. He doesn't have a body; he's nothing but air. He's never felt anything like this before.

He can feel limbs, it's a distantly familiar feeling, but he can't force any movement. What he does feel is fuzzy— that numb feeling you get when your foot or hand falls asleep. Pins and needles, just... just *everywhere*. His body has no coordination, isn't really there, but it also... it feels like it's there.

It's like he has no control over this body.

He squints harder down at himself, almost blinded by the white covering his body. He's in a strait jacket, or even a body suit maybe? It has absolutely no give. His arms and legs already feel like they're not entirely his, but the suit makes moving impossible.

And if that wasn't enough, he's bound to a chair. He's very *tightly* bound to a chair, like he's... like he's a *threat* or something. He's not a threat. He'd never hurt anyone. He'd never hurt his friends.

Why is...

Oboro feels tears pricking in the corners of his eyes.

Like actual, wet tears. He wishes he could reach a hand up to rub at the corners of his eyes, if only to prove to himself there are actual tears there.

But he still *feels* tears, and he feels his eyes and his cheeks and—

And that's *impossible*.

He's dead. He'd died. Years ago. He'd stood beside his own body before turning away to find Shota, needing to assure himself that his friend was okay even when he... He needed to make sure Shota was okay— that he survived, and that he was alright. He'd grieved himself with his friends; had watched his friends stand over him, he'd watched his family and friends mourn him. He died. He doesn't exist anymore.

But he's here. He's in a body, *his* body, he thinks. He's in his body, but he's dead. He's been dead for thirteen years. It's like he'd been... sucked into his body again. He's here, and he's solid and he sees them — *they see him*— but he can't do anything.

He can't force himself to speak, or to do anything. It's like something is holding him back.

What the hell is going on?

He feels so overwhelmed, which is something he doesn't even know how to process anymore. His friends are yelling; they're yelling *at* him. Shota is yelling, all but screaming, really, and he's crying and Oboro has never heard him sound like this.

He thinks he hears banging and when he forces his gaze up, they're pounding desperately at the glass.

He wants to reach out to them.

He wants to call out. Wants to plead for help, or even to tell them he's alright. He wants to say something, but he doesn't even know what he could say; still can't even force his mouth to move.

He pleads desperately with his eyes, hoping they notice it; it's all he thinks he's able to really do. He hopes that they see him fighting for them too, but he just can't do anything more. He doesn't know if they notice, or not. He's not thinking clearly anyways. Can hardly notice anything past this feeling of having a solid form again.

But he doesn't think it's going to last long. What little control he has is fluctuating, and it's going fast. What little of the purple haze he'd managed to clear away from his vision is returning with a vengeance, as the static in his limbs gets more intense and he...

Something is fighting against him.

It feels like... like he's fighting for control.

He's fighting for control, and he's *losing*.

He's forced out of his own body as if none of that had even happened in the first place. It's a horrible feeling, and that's coming from the guy who got crushed by a building. He has all these feelings and then... and then nothing. Back to nothing. No body. No form. Just... a ghost.

He can only stare wide-eyed at what had just been.

His heart is in his stomach as he stares at... him.

But that's not him.

That's not who he looked at in the mirror every morning.

That's not Shirakumo Oboro, or... or even Loud Cloud.

That's a complete stranger that stares back unseeingly.

No, wait, that's not even right. Oboro has seen this guy before. He's seen this... this body. *His body*. He's seen it, because that's Shigaraki's guy. The villain who works with the League; the one with the portal void Quirk.

This is the same man that had attacked the USJ with Shigaraki—who'd hurt Shota, and Izuku, and All Might, and Thirteen, and who had dropped all those poor unsuspecting first-year kids into the hands of waiting villains. This is the villain who'd *stolen* two kids from a training camp.

This is definitely Shigaraki's henchman, but that's... that's *Oboro's body*.

He's sure of it. There's no way it couldn't have been.

It felt so familiar, and he... there's no chance he could've been sucked back into a stranger's body. This is impossible, but that's simply *insane*. He doesn't even know what the hell is going on, but he knows that's him he's staring at.

That's him who he'd just... *been* again.

After being gone for thirteen years; being dead for thirteen years.

That's him, even if... even if it's not. *Not anymore.*

The purple has completely consumed his face again; no trace of Oboro's tanned skin, or his blue eyes, or even his fluffy pale blue hair. He knows it's him, his body, under whatever the hell kind of Quirk that is, but it doesn't feel like he's looking at himself.

The body is emotionless, expressionless even. It sees right past him as if it hadn't just stolen his consciousness all the way from Yuuei to wherever the hell they are right now, flickery, unblinking yellow eyes just staring calmly at a wrecked pair of high school friends.

Oboro feels sorry for the two of them to have witnessed that, when he chances a glance back at their expressions. Shota draws in heaving, unsteady breaths, one fist and one open palm still pressed against the glass separating them, and Hizashi's face is buried in his hands.

He has half a mind to try to console them, as pointless as that may seem, but he can't seem to really focus on them. He doesn't think he could focus on much of anything after that.

He'd been *back*.

He'd had... a body, and a heartbeat. He'd felt it pounding in his chest, thumping all the way up in his ears. He could breathe; he had felt oxygen filling lungs, *his* lungs, and he could feel his body shake with fear, anxiety and adrenaline; things he's only dreamed of feeling again for years.

He'd felt *real* again— he'd felt *alive*.

He stares horror-stricken at this person in front of him.

At himself without... without *him*—

That's his body, that someone else, no, something else, is using.

His body is being used as a criminal. His body is a villain. His body has been... he's been... working for the League all this time. All this time that Oboro has been dead, nothing but the ghost of who he'd once been— trailing after his friends, and Izuku— this entire time the League has had his body. He's been a *criminal* all this time.

Oboro feels sick— his stomach recoils and he knows if he was able to

throw up, if he had a body, if he had the body right there in front of him again, he probably would've thrown up.

He can't be here anymore.

He can't stand looking at him.

Looking at that person who'd been him, who is him.

That's his body.

That's...

Oboro swallows roughly, turning away. He glances at his friends. They haven't moved. Now that he's actually looking, he notices Gran Torino and Detective Tsukauchi. They're talking about a heartbeat, or... or a *lack* of heartbeat. He can hardly make the words out through the panic engulfing him.

He really needs to go, but he can't force himself to move. He just... stares at himself. Stares at who he'd become after death. What they'd... *done* to him.

He was one of them, wasn't he?

One of those creatures.

All for One had made him into a Nomu. Shigaraki's henchman was a Nomu. Shigaraki's henchman was a Nomu made out of Oboro's corpse. That's why he was so blindly loyal to that nutcase.

That's why Izuku couldn't figure out Kurogiri's mind; he literally didn't have a mind *to* figure out.

He was nothing but a zombie who was programed to help Shigaraki. A creature with no agenda other than to aide Shigaraki and his goal of world domination or whatever the hell that villain had planned.

Oboro doesn't know how long he stands there.

Long enough that the voices behind him fade off. Silence blankets the room now, and the villain doesn't say or do anything, even when left to his own devices. He's completely disconnected, almost as if in stasis without external stimuli.

He doesn't even move.

Oboro feels weak just looking at this person. He feels like his knees are going to buckle under him and he's going to topple down to the floor. This is... it's a nightmare.

It's a nightmare and he's never going to wake up from it.

When he finally manages to tear himself away from staring at the monster in front of him, he knows he needs to leave. He can't stomach staying here any longer. He needs to go. He needs to leave.

He leaves without a thought.

Simply blinks out of existence and reappears somewhere else. He can't forget the look on his face, on that thing's face. His body so pliant and dull.

His body...

"Hey," Oboro startles, whipping around to face the sudden voice. Izuku cocks his head in Oboro's direction, and it takes a long second for the ghost to realize they're standing in the hallway outside the apartment. "Where have you been? Class ended hours ago, and you were just gone. That's not like you. Also, have you seen Shota and Hizashi yet? I don't think they're back and I'm getting sorta worried."

Oboro sucks in a breath, everything coming back to him at once.

"Izuku," he croaks out, rubbing hard at his own eyes. He wishes he could feel the tears. Wishes he could've wiped away the tears he'd felt.

"Hey..." Izuku frowns, hand easing away from the door, "what's wrong?"

Oboro lets out a humorless laugh.

What isn't wrong?

"Have you ever seen *Ghostbusters*?" he asks instead. Because that's easier than telling Izuku what had just happened. "You know, that old movie where the four guys go around New York can catch ghosts?"

"Uhm," Izuku squints in confusion, "maybe? I think so, why?"

"I think..." Oboro laughs again, and it's just so not funny. "I think I know what it feels like to be sucked into one of their vacuum backpacks. It's shit, Izuku."

He's still laughing, but it's defeat now. Humorless laughter that sounds pathetic and broken even to his own ears. And he may actually be crying. His voice is curled with fear, terror and defeat.

He doesn't know how else to feel.

How else are you supposed to feel after that?

After finding out your body was turned into a monster working for the opposite side when all you ever wanted to be was a *Hero*? He feels so completely wrecked. So broken. So hurt. He even feels *guilty*.

"Oboro," Izuku inches closer, hand hovering like he doesn't know what to do, "what are you talking about? Are you... are you okay?"

"No," Oboro cries out through another laugh. Yep, he's definitely crying now. He wipes at his eyes with his palms, pressing hard into his eye sockets. He feels nothing. Not anymore. He's a ghost again. "I'm really not okay, man."

"What happened?" Izuku asks again, slowly. "You were there one second, and then you were gone! I-I thought you just went to check if Sho and 'zashi were back, but then you never came back. I just... don't understand, I guess."

"Neither do I," Oboro manages through a sob. "I just... it's going to sound really fucking insane, Izuku. Like, you might not even believe me sorta insane. I barely believe me and I— I-It happened to me..."

"As a guy who can see ghosts," Izuku gives a sad smile, "I'm sure I'll believe you."

So Oboro tells him. He tells him everything. About his body, and the presence that was there as well, whatever had shoved him out of his own body. Whatever had taken control. He tells the teen about Shota and Hizashi, though he doesn't remember much of that. All he really remembers is their expressions. The look in their eyes as he talked to *him*, and not Kurogiri.

Oboro has calmed a bit after getting it all off his chest, but he's still jittery and anxious. Nauseous after finding everything out. It's a lot to swallow. He still doesn't know how to process all this.

"You..." Izuku breathes out, "you were back in your body?"

"For a couple seconds," the ghost whispers brokenly, "there was

something else there. I... I don't even know. The Nomu programming, or brain, or whatever. I got kicked out of my own body. My body exists somewhere without me. I've been... I've hurt so many people—"

"No," Izuku cuts him off, "stop that. You have not. Kurogiri has hurt people. Shigaraki and All for One hurt you. Kurogiri was programmed to help them. *You've* been watching over us. Keeping us safe. You've been my best friend and my biggest supporter. You can't blame yourself."

"It's my body!"

"It's a Nomu!" Izuku snaps back. "It may have been you, but it's not anymore. It's... not you, Oboro. You've been here while he's been... there."

Oboro wilts in defeat before he straightens sharply.

"I was back in my body," Oboro says after a second, like he's just realized that was what happened. There's a new intensity in his blue eyes as he stares thoughtfully at Izuku. "Izuku I was back in my body. I... I was in it. I was back. I could *be* back. What if I could have my body back? I thought it was gone, but it... wasn't. I was back, even if just for a second..."

"How would you do that?" Izuku inches away from the odd look in the ghost's eyes.

"You," Oboro turns to him confidently, "you could help me. I don't know what your Quirk does, but if you can use my Quirk then maybe... maybe you could use your Quirk to help me get my body back. I had it but I needed more power. It was stronger than me. I'm stronger when you're around, and I'm strong enough to use my Quirk when we touch! That has to mean something!"

"How the hell am I supposed to do that?" Izuku recoils in disbelief. "Kurogiri is in Tartarus. You do realize that's the most secured prison in all of Japan, right? Maybe even the entire world! What, you want me to play vigilante and break in? Risk everything— my guardians, my spot in Yuuei, my Hero career— literally *everything* just for something that might not even work?"

"We have to try!" Oboro snaps, pushing in closer to Izuku. "I could come back! Izuku, you have to help me!"

"You can't seriously be asking this of me," Izuku takes another step

back. He stares at the ghost like he's grown a second head. "How do you expect me to do that?"

"Tell them," Oboro crosses his arms over his chest. "Tell Shota and Hizashi about me. You've put it off for so long. They're not going to treat you any differently! You *have* to tell them! I could get my body back! I could come back!"

"No!" Izuku narrows his eyes, almost a little hurt. "You know I can't. You know *why* I can't."

"You can," Oboro huffs in annoyance. "You *can*, you just *won't*. I thought we were friends? Why won't you help me? I can't do this alone, Izuku!"

"Because you're being unreasonable," Izuku snaps angrily. "This is my life, Oboro! This is my life we're playing around with, not yours! It's my life that's going to shatter to pieces if I tell them and they think I'm a freak! This is my life that'll crumble when they decide they don't want the weird kid around anymore. I'm going to be the one hurt when this undoubtedly backfires! You're not the one this is going to affect, Oboro, I am."

"You're being selfish!" Oboro snarls right back, clearly angry.

Izuku freezes.

Selfish...?

Oboro thinks he's...

"Izuku," the ghost deflates when he realizes what he'd said. He sucks in a shaky breath and takes a tiny step towards Izuku, "wait, I didn't mean—"

Izuku flinches back as the ghost's hand comes towards him.

"*Don't* touch me."

Oboro stills, scans Izuku regretfully, but doesn't back away. No, he steps closer once again, and Izuku grits his teeth at that. Oboro has always respected his wishes when it came to proximity and touching, but now he's clearly not. "Izuku, I'm sorry—"

Izuku turns to the door, fist tightening on the handle.

Selfish.

“I’ve never once been selfish,” Izuku snaps out brokenly, eyes squeezing shut to stave off the tears welling. “You… you should know that better than anyone. I’m *not* selfish. Protecting myself isn’t being selfish. *You’re being selfish*. Expecting something like this from me is selfish. I’m sorry this happened to you. I’m sorry you went through that. I’m sorry, Oboro, okay? I’m so sorry. But you don’t get to demand for me to give everything up. You don’t get to expect that of me. I’m not a *tool* for you to use, I’m a person.”

“Izuku I never—”

“You don’t even know this is going to work.” Izuku breathes out, annoyance and hurt fluttering in his chest. “You expect me to ruin everything I have on the off chance this won’t actually fail? On the off chance you… you what? End up back in your body? Do you hear how insane that sounds? Have you even considered this? What you're asking of me? Have you even considered me? I’ve hidden this for a reason. I don’t tell people for a reason. You know why and you still… I can't believe you.”

Oboro is silent.

Izuku bites hard at his lip, glaring down at his shoes.

“You’re a ghost, Oboro,” Izuku is in near hysterics at this point, “you’re a ghost. You were a ghost long before you met me. You died when I was a baby. You’re expecting me to *play God* here. You died. You want me to risk everything— to risk the family I’ve always wanted and finally have, the school I’ve always dreamed of attending, the friends I never thought I’d have— to try and do something I might not even be able to do?”

“I just want to come back.”

The defeat is so clear that Izuku wants to start sobbing right there. Oboro is his best friend and Izuku doesn’t want him to hurt. He wants to cry for the ghost and promise him everything he’s ever wanted. He really wishes he could do this for Oboro. He would do this for Oboro.

He really, really would, he’d do anything for the ghost, but he’s scared.

He’s *terrified*.

“I can’t risk them,” Izuku forces out, voice watery and broken.

He sniffles miserably, “you can’t ask me to give it all up for a *chance* that something might happen. I can’t lose another family because of this— this stupid Quirk! I can’t do it again. It’s weird. I’m weird. You shouldn’t even exist, but you do. I shouldn’t be able to see you. Don’t make me lose them too.”

“Izuku—”

Izuku feels the ghost’s hand on his shoulder at the same time he hears the elevator ding. He’s frozen in fear as wide green eyes jerk to the open elevator doors and... and out steps Shota and Hizashi. They look upset, and wrecked, but their eyes widen simultaneously when they see Izuku and... and *Oboro*.

He feels eyes on him. Confused and shocked. Studying and clearly disbelieving.

He’s touching the ghost.

Oboro is touching him.

They’re...

“Oboro?” Hizashi breathes out weakly and Izuku shoves the ghost off of him with all his force. Oboro stumbles back and Izuku knows he’s disappeared from sight instantly.

He always does when he’s no longer solid.

Tears pool in his eyes and his heart races as panic washes over him. Fear claws at his stomach and he feels like he’s going to throw up. He’d fucked up. They’d fucked up.

They saw... they saw a ghost.

They saw Oboro.

Oh no.

“Izuku, what—”

And Izuku turns on his heels and sprints.

He can’t even think.

Can hardly hear anything over his own pounding heart. He’s out the stairwell door faster than he’s ever moved before, taking the stairs

three or four at a time. He's not sure how he hasn't broken his foot or something as he stumbles hastily.

He hears pounding footsteps following him, shouts of his name begging him to stop, but he *can't.*

They know.

They know, they know, they know.

What now?

What is he supposed to do?

They were never supposed to know. They were never supposed to find out.

No one was.

God, he's so screwed...

He rushes through the dorms, only half aware of some of his peers calling out to him— Hitoshi even trying to stop him when he notices Shota on his heels. Izuku distantly hears questions like *'what's wrong' 'where's the fire?' 'are you okay?'*, but he doesn't stop. He hardly even feels bad about pushing Hitoshi out of the way and sprinting past him.

Izuku manages his way out the doors, ignoring everything and then he... he lets Blackwhip loose.

The tendrils of Quirk burst out of him, snagging one of the balcony support poles on the front of the building, before launching him into the sky and towards the forest. When it's close enough, the Quirk reaches for branches and it's swinging effortlessly like a monkey or something.

When the large gates come into view, he's launched upwards again, and then he's being flung over the gates. Blackwhip catches on a tree on the opposite side, and Izuku reins the Quirk in once he's alone.

He knows Shota can't emulate Blackwhip with his capture weapon, no matter how hard he tries.

He's fast and agile, but he's still a human battling a Quirk. Impossible odds. Even if Shota erased Izuku's Quirk, he'd risk Izuku falling and getting hurt.

Izuku knows Shota would never.

Izuku takes off before he even realizes he’s running.

Chapter End Notes

Hi c: Sooo?

Remember when I said the end was near a couple chapters back? I wasn't joking! We've finally hit the reveal that everyone has been waiting nearly two years for! This was the scene that sparked this entire fic. As soon as I watched Shota and Hizashi finding out Kurogiri was Oboro, I thought of this plot, so hopefully it's as good as I always wanted it to be! I liked making this chapter. Bullying sweet little sunshine characters is a lot of fun :D

As always comments are very, very greatly appreciated! I'm always so worried about how these chapters are going to be like because we're getting to the end :(Anyways, I appreciated you all, and any interaction you're willing to leave! Thank you so much for reading, and I'll see you in the next update!

Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Hello! I am back again, probably a lot faster then you guys expected to see me! :)

Can I just thank you all so much for the support on the last chapter? We're over 350 comments on that chapter alone, and I am simply floored! I'm so glad you guys are liking this fic as much as you are, because I've loved every second of making it! Thank you all for liking the fic!

We got some more some more art of this fic! Both are coming from SoTiredKitten on both Tumblr and ao3! First we have the cutest little tea party of Izuku, Oboro and Eri from a few chapters ago! It's literally so adorable, so thank you so much for making it! And the other art is our fav sunshine boys in a really cool art style! Thank you for the lovely art! :D

And we also have another Tiktok too! Thanks to cloudyghostspace on Tiktok for making another amazing video! Enjoy the cute little animated skit between Izuku and Oboro in cloudy's cute art style! Thank you!

Anyways! Onwards with the fic, I hope you enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shit.

That's about all that's running through Shota's head as he chases after Izuku.

He knew his foster son was fast, but this was a new record even for him. Shota has experience in stuff like this, and Izuku is still leaving him in the dust. He hadn't realized the kid could haul ass like this.

And that Quirk usage— Shota hasn't seen anything like that when it comes to Izuku using Blackwhip, but of course *now*, when Shota just can't seem to get close enough to grab the kid, is when Izuku masters that new Quirk of his and becomes virtually untouchable.

Figures, honestly. That just about sums up this day.

Shota can't get close enough to his kid to grab him, and he can hardly keep pace with the franticness of the Quirk he's using. He'd been trying to call out to Izuku, but he receives no acknowledgment, and the teen doesn't even seem to hear him in the panicked state.

Izuku trapezes through the trees like some sort of acrobat or something, and Shota can barely keep up with his capture weapon. And not to mention how it launches Izuku into the air in a way Shota can't possibly emulate with what he's got. Each time it flings the teenager into the sky, Shota's heart jumps into his throat, but Izuku's control is immaculate right now, always catching himself swiftly.

"Shit," Shota stops just shy of slamming into the Yuuei fence, heart hammering in his chest as he watches his kid being flung over said fence. "Shit! Izuku, please! Talk to me, kid!"

No response.

No acknowledgment.

Shota grimaces to himself as he draws his arm back and hooks his capture weapon over the top of the fence. By the time he manages to scale the side of the wall using his capture weapon, Izuku is gone.

He has no idea which way the teenager went, has no idea where he'd even go.

He'd never expected Izuku to run like this; never expected to need to chase the child, or *brainstorm* where he could've disappeared to. This was out of Izuku's character, and Shota's heart shatters in his chest knowing that this was something they'd done, something that had happened within the past five minutes, that had thrown Izuku into such a panic.

This is bad.

Truthfully, Shota doesn't even know what happened.

One second, they were walking out of the elevator and then... then he'd seen Oboro. He'd seen Oboro clear as day, standing right beside Izuku— *touching* Izuku— and then his high school friend had disappeared instantly, and Izuku was turning away from them and bolting.

He'd... seen his dead school friend who he'd just found out had been turned into a Nomu.

Fuck, that's a lot to wrap his head around, isn't it?

He should've known his day wasn't going to go well, but he hadn't expected it to turn out as shitty as it had. He should've known when his morning had gone well that a storm was brewing.

And storm it did.

For one second as Shota stands on top of the fence and scans the opposite side for any sign of the kid, Shota panics. He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't even know what even really happened just now—can't seem to wrap his head around it.

But Izuku is gone, and he can't just stand up here like an idiot.

He doesn't know where the teenager would've gone; doesn't even know where to start looking, or even which direction he'd disappeared off into.

That's the truth of the situation.

He doesn't know, but that doesn't mean someone else won't have any idea of where the boy could've gone. Izuku had friends, and others who care about him.

Shota just prays that someone has at least *some* idea of where Izuku could be heading.

So, he spins on his heels and heads back towards the dorms with a new sense of urgency.

This isn't a problem he can face alone.

He hasn't the slightest idea where Izuku would go. As he'd stared at that completely baren side of the fence, it had made his stomach coil at the thought of how little they actually knew about Izuku.

Where was that place that provided comfort?

Was there somewhere he'd disappear to when stressed and overwhelmed?

He just didn't know.

He stands on the steps outside the 1-A dorms for a moment, lungs heaving for air as he stares at the doors. He really has no idea what he's about to find in there. It's not like Izuku had left on the best of

terms, and Shota hadn't paid anyone else any mind in his pursuit of Izuku.

He knows some of the class had witnessed the chase.

And he... well, he doesn't know what to make of the Oboro situation. He doesn't even really know what to think about that, but it's a bridge he'll cross when he gets to it. For now, Izuku is his first priority. His kid running from them, genuinely *terrified*, will always be his first priority.

Shota hesitates for a second longer before pulling out his phone.

He knows right now Shota isn't the one who knows Izuku best. He's lost, and he's just praying someone who knows the teenager will point them in the right direction.

All he has to do is reach out.

Aizawa Shota 6:42PM

Can you think of anywhere Izuku likes to go that's off campus?

He stares at the sent message for no longer than half a second before pocketing his phone and marching into the dorms. And, just as he'd expected, the 1-A kids are crowded in the common area, obviously awaiting his arrival.

"Sensei!" Tenya jerks up first, marching into the center of the room as if to play mediator between Shota and the students, "is everything alright? What happened? You left quite unexpectedly, and we were unsure of why!"

"And... where's Mido-bro?" Kirishima leans to the side, where he's perched on the edge of the coffee table as if trying to spot Izuku hiding behind Shota or something. "Is he... okay?"

"Sensei, is Deku in trouble?" Uraraka asks nervously. They all look genuinely worried at the thought, and Shota understands it. Izuku is a good, well-behaved brat when he's not ignoring the rules, playing vigilante or forgetting what little self-preservation skills he has and taking on fights he's ill prepared for. "I mean... you've just never chased any of us like that... did he do something?"

"Midoriya is not in trouble," Shota bites out, glaring at the group.

Maybe it's disagreeable to be taking out his emotions on the students, but he can't be bothered to explain anything, and frankly, this is none of their business.

He gets the worry, but that doesn't mean they're privy to a personal situation.

Shota draws in a breath through his nose, eyeing the students, "this is of none of your concern. You're all excused. Shinsou. Bakugou. Both of you, come with me. I need to speak with both of you. Everyone else, I'm sure you have *something* you can be doing that's not prying or hovering, and if you don't, I'd be more than happy to assign chores or suicide sprints to occupy your time. Choose wisely."

It's no surprise how fast the students disperse.

Any threat of any sort of punishment has them running, or on their best behavior. And he thinks they've known him long enough now to know when not to push buttons. He usually doesn't mind the pestering from his class, but right now it's getting on his nerves.

It feels like only a moment passes and suddenly Shota is alone in the room with Bakugou and Hitoshi.

"What the hell is this about?" Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest, glaring at Shota over his nose. "What the fuck did Deku do this time, and why the hell am I a part of it?"

"Something obviously happened you jackass," Hitoshi snaps, "or can you just not read a room with that overinflated ego of yours—"

"Listen here Eyebags—"

"Enough!" Shota growls, already fed up with them. Bakugou's jaw snaps shut as his brow furrows in annoyance as Hitoshi wilts guiltily, looking away shamefully. "You're both *one word* away from house arrest. Do *not* test me. Not today. Now both of you. Get up. Come with me."

Each teenager rises to their feet and doesn't say a word as Shota stiffly leads them up the stairs and into the apartment. It's far too quiet up here. His heart breaks when he sees Hizashi sitting on the edge of the couch cushions, head hanging low and face in his hands.

He jolts up when he hears the movement, but wilts just as fast when he sees Shota without their child. He doesn't even seem to realize

Shota has Bakugou and Hitoshi with him, he'd been that laser focused on the lack of Izuku.

"Shota... you didn't catch him?"

Hizashi's wobbly voice feels like a dagger through Shota's heart.

Shota looks away guiltily.

There's a small part of him that's immensely proud of the teenager for honing control of his Quirk and managing to outrun Shota when he needed to— it was a good display of how much the teenager had grown in class and training, but the bigger part of him, the part of him who is this boy's guardian and not his teacher, is so completely wrecked and worried that he'd felt like he *needed* to run.

There had been no thought; Izuku had sprinted purely on instinct.

And it honestly scared Shota that his kid had the skills to leave everyone in his dust now. That even he with his years of underground Hero work and capture weapon expertise had been left in Izuku's dust.

"He was too fast with that new Quirk of his. I could barely keep up. I've never seen him use it so fluidly. I... could've hurt him if I erased it. You didn't see how he was moving, Hizashi. He made it over the gate. I didn't see where he went."

"Hang on," Hitoshi marches forwards, looking between the two men with narrowed eyes, "what the hell did the two of you do to him? I've never seen Izuku so frantic like that. Why were you even chasing him anyways?"

"Because he was running," Shota deadpans with a glare shot in Hitoshi's direction. "And he was panicking. No one makes smart choices when they're panicking. I wanted to make sure he was safe, but he obviously managed to outrun me, and now we don't know where he is."

"Why the hell was the nerd panicking in the first place?" Shota turns his head to the side to see Bakugou watching him over his nose. There's an unusual calmness in the ashen-haired boy's expression, but Shota wholeheartedly believes it's a calm before a storm that he very much wants to avoid. "The fuck'd you two *fosters* do to him? He may be a shitty nerd, but if either of you—"

"Katsuki," Hizashi's voice is scarily serious, yet entirely calm, "we'd

never do anything to hurt Izuku. Nothing intentional at least. I... I don't know what happened. He just... and there was... *he* was there, and then he was *gone* and Izuku he... God, I don't even know. I can't wrap my head around it..."

Hizashi hesitates, scrubbing at his face with his palms before finally looking over at Shota, "Shota did you even...? I just- I need to know I'm not crazy. You... did you...?"

"Did I..." Shota swallows, "did I see him too?"

Hizashi draws in a sharp inhale.

Shota hadn't really answered, but at the same time, he had.

"See who?" Hitoshi's calculation gaze sweeps between Shota and Hizashi.

"Someone who's not..." Hizashi gnaws on his bottom lip, "he's not really around anymore. He *shouldn't* be around anymore. It's just not... it couldn't have been—"

"We thought we saw someone who..." Shota hesitates, "someone who died. Someone who's been gone for a long time now."

"Hang on," Bakugou jerks up, "you mean, you're tellin' us that you saw a dead guy with Deku? That's fucked up, but it tracks for Deku."

Shota whips to face Bakugou, whose sharp eyes are flicking between his teachers.

Shota's mouth feels dry when he forces it open to speak, "what?"

"What?" Bakugou repeats, eyebrows furrowing before understanding settles in his features.

"Wait... you two didn't know?" the surprise on Bakugou's face is miniscule, but there, "shit," the ashen-haired teen shakes his head, "I thought Auntie, that bitch, would've ratted Deku out the second she had a chance. My mom told me she was arrested, and I know Aizawa-Sensei wouldn't keep his nose outta it when it comes to Deku. I saw how you were in the hospital. You met her, didn't you, Sensei? You must've seen; she's always going off about how Deku's *insane*, how he's *sick* in the head. And I... I believed her too, until..."

"Until he showed you," Hitoshi turns wide-eyed to Bakugou. "Shit. He

told me you knew but I didn't think an asshole like you would ever believe him. Colour me surprised."

"Damn nerd showed you too then?" Bakugou squints over his nose at Hitoshi. "I knew before you did, you shitty extra. Just cause I knew, doesn't mean I believed the headcase. No one did. But yeah, Deku made his asshole ghost of his walk *through* me or some shit. I wanted proof, but I didn't think he'd be a dick about it. Coldest shit I've ever felt in my life. Then the bastard played with my lights. Hard to ignore that. I'm still pissed he brought a ghost to my house."

"Hang on," Hizashi blinks between the two boys, eyes wide, "what are you two... what are you talking about?"

"Deku sees ghosts," it's Bakugou who says it, as if it's obvious. "Always has. You mean to tell me you two never noticed anything wrong with him? I'm not saying he's weird or anything, but Deku's fuckin' *odd*. That's just who the dumb nerd is. He hides it better now, but he's always slipping up. I thought you two would've figured that one out already. Doesn't he live with you?"

Shota takes a second to let that sink in before he draws in an unsteady breath.

His gaze shoots towards Hitoshi, who doesn't look surprised.

"You're telling me you knew all this time?" Shota demands from his nephew, "you knew and you didn't tell anyone? Didn't tell us? Hitoshi, what the hell?"

"Did you *need* to know?" the purple-haired teen arches an eyebrow, "seems to me this doesn't harm him, or put him in danger in any way. He didn't want you to know. I respected that. He's my friend, uncle Shota. He's my friend and he trusted me. I didn't see any reason to break that trust."

"Uncle?" Bakugou whips around to face Hitoshi. "So that's why you're so close with Deku. Figures. I thought he was just collecting the riffraff, like that asshole IcyHot who Deku somehow managed to befriend. Deku's always been a sucker for the friendless losers. Collects them like stray puppies or some shit."

"I'd be offended if it was anyone else but *you* saying that," Hitoshi snaps back. "How you have any friends is beyond me. I don't know how a nice guy like Izuku could ever consider you a friend."

“He was my friend first, you shitty bastard!” Bakugou roars, turning sharply to glare at Hitoshi.

“Knock it off!” Shota snaps. “The two of you are insufferable together, you know that? Bakugou, don’t call your classmates names, and Hitoshi, quit picking fights when you know you’ll set him off. You both need to grow up. You two can argue about all this later; I don’t care who was Izuku’s friend first, it doesn’t *matter*. Izuku is *gone*. And apparently there’s way more to this than either of us thought. We need to find him.”

“Right. Sorry.” Hitoshi bows his head shamefully. He glances over at Bakugou mistrustingly but doesn’t say anything to the other teenager. “What do you need from us then? Are you sending us out to help search?”

“You’re the last two I’d send out to look for him,” Shota scoffs, ignoring the matching looks of offense. “Let the adults handle this. You two know Izuku best though. Where would he go? Is there anywhere you can think of that he’d go to if he was overwhelmed? Anywhere that provides him comfort, or somewhere he’d go when scared. Any specific place he likes?”

Bakugou hesitates thoughtfully, “there’s a big park downtown that my mom used to bring us to when we were brats. Useless nerd followed me around like a damned mutt there, along with all those other shitty extras. There’s a playground and a creek— a bridge. He used to like spending time there. That’s all I know. Deku didn’t get out much. He’s a homebody. I doubt the loser would go to my house and he can’t go home anymore. Nowhere else he’d go; that I know of at least. We're not exactly close anymore.”

“Anything helps,” Hizashi assures gently, earning himself a glare shot over Bakugou’s nose. It’s relatively soft though, maybe even worried. Hizashi doesn’t seem to take any offense.

“There’s a playground by your guy’s apartment he likes too,” Hitoshi adds after a second. “A couple blocks away. Hard to miss. He brought me there. The place is something out of a horror movie, honestly, but he seemed to like it anyways. Rundown and overgrown. Abandoned. We probably got lead poisoning from the paint.”

“Wonderful,” Shota scoffs, bowing his head in a nod, nonetheless. “I’m so glad we’re hearing about this deathtrap of a playground *now*. Okay. Thank you. We’ll look into these spots. You’re both dismissed. I

assume I don't need to remind either of you that what we discussed in this room does not leave this apartment."

"Yeah, yeah," Bakugou pushes himself up off the couch, "just find the useless nerd before he gets himself into trouble or something. Deku's probably catatonic at this point— always anxious and skittish. He kept this a secret for a reason, so don't fuck this up. He... likes you two for some godforsaken reason, don't hurt him. Nerd doesn't need that in his life anymore."

With that, Bakugou storms out of the apartment without another word.

"He almost sounded nice," Hitoshi blinks in surprise.

Shota ignores the comment, turning to a worryingly quiet Hizashi, "we're going to find him, Hizashi."

"Japan is a big place," the blonde gnaws on his bottom lip, "he was scared of us, Shota."

"No," Hitoshi interjects with a frown, "he's scared of what you'll think about him, not scared of you. When he told me about his ghost friend, he was terrified of either of you finding out. Apparently, Ro's been haunting your apartment for years. Clings to you two now, I suppose he likes you guys. I guess Izuku didn't want to scare you guys. I... never really asked why he was so insistent you two didn't know, but I assumed it was something to do with his parents, you know?"

"*Ro*?" Hizashi repeats, sounding winded. The blonde shoots Shota a wide-eyed look before looking back at Hitoshi, "Hitoshi, how much do you know about this ghost?"

At this, Hitoshi's brow furrows in confusion, "just what Izuku told me. His name is Ro, I think he's a teenager? He never told me that, it's just a vibe I get. He's played games with me— really likes your game console and he's, like, surprisingly good at it for a dead guy. He's a romance kinda guy? I don't know, he's just... always been a package deal with Izuku. Where Izuku goes, Ro goes. He seemed nice enough."

"Have you ever seen this ghost?" Shota asks slowly.

"No," Hitoshi frowns, "he's a dead guy with no solid form. How would I see him? I'm not Izuku. I haven't seen the guy, but I have talked to him."

“Talked to him?” Hizashi repeats, looking more and more frazzled by the second. “How?”

“Well,” Hitoshi bites his lip, glancing between the two men hesitantly, “I doubt he’d be able to do it now. Izuku said Ro is able to use his energy. I think that’s what he said, at least. Without Izuku around, he’s limited. And it tracks too. When Izuku was kidnapped, Ro didn’t have the strength to use the game controller to talk, which was how we’d talked before. So, he had to resort to using the lights. And, I mean, it worked too. That's how I was able to find the 1-A kids and figure out a plan for the rescue mission. He was with us the whole time. I think.”

“You were guided into an act of vigilantism by a ghost?” Shota can’t seem to keep the incredulity from his tone as he processes that.

Oboro had enlisted Hitoshi into a rescue mission for Izuku from the *afterlife*?

What the fuck?

“When you put it like that it sounds *weird*,” Hitoshi puffs his cheeks out. “We both wanted the same thing: to get Izuku back. He had information I needed, so we teamed up for a cause. Now, what’s this about the two of you *seeing* a ghost? Who was it? Was it Ro? I can’t think of any other ghost Izuku mentioned, so it had to have been Ro.”

“It was... Oboro,” Shota breathes out, “our school friend. The one who died on internships...”

“Oboro,” Hitoshi blinks slowly as he processes. “Ro... Obo-*ro*... that jackass played me! Damn, Izuku. All this time I’ve been hanging out with your friend Oboro. That’s... actually kinda weird. I don’t know what to think about that.”

Shota startles, hand reaching out to protect Hitoshi when the lights overhead flicker. Shota’s heart pounds in his chest as his gaze shoots to the ceiling.

“He’s here,” Hitoshi whispers singsongingly.

“Hitoshi!” Hizashi squeaks out, “don’t be creepy! I’m freaked out enough without you acting like a creepy kid in a horror movie! I’m already struggling to wrap my brain around this!”

Hitoshi lifts his hands in mock surrender, attention lifting to the

ceiling, “it’s okay. I’m sorry. Look, hello, *Oboro*. I’ve finally figured you out. Your and Izuku's little logical ruse. I’m a little salty you two lied to me. See? Easy. It’s like talking to a person who only sorta exists.”

The lights flicker again as if in answer.

Shota is distantly reminded of that night he’d found Izuku on the streets. Following faulty streetlamps that had done *this* exactly. Oboro had been... back then too?

Shota knows he never would’ve found the kid without those streetlights.

Holy shit.

“He’s really...” Hizashi croaks out breathlessly, “he’s really here? Shota, I knew there was something here! And it was... oh my God. All those times you called me crazy for seeing lights turning off and on, I was right!”

Shota swallows roughly before shaking his head, “okay, fine, you were right. Now, can I bring everyone back around to the fact that Izuku is gone and we don’t know where he is?”

“Ro might know,” Hitoshi’s brow furrows, gaze lifting once again to the light fixture. “Do you know where Izuku is right now?”

The lights flick off and they’re blanketed in darkness.

“Okay... uh,” Hitoshi suddenly sounds worried. “That means no. He doesn’t know where Izuku is.”

“Shit,” Shota breathes out, worry tugging at his heart. He hears Hizashi draw in a shaky, worried breath, but Shota can’t force himself to look towards his husband. Doesn’t want to see fear or worry.

Shota’s know buzzes in his pocket, and he’s quick to pull it out, eyes settling on the new text notification. Hopefulness flutters in his chest at the response.

Yagi Toshinori 7:01PM

Off campus?

Young Midoriya was awfully fond of Dagobah beach when we used to train around there. He liked to sit and watch the ocean.

I'm afraid that's the only place I can think of, we truly didn't spend any time together anywhere but the beach.

Why? Is something the matter, Aizawa?

Shota grits his teeth, leaving the man on read.

He can fill the retired Pro in when he knows Izuku is safe or... if worse comes to worst, when they ask for the man's help if they can't track Izuku down before nightfall. It's not much time, but Shota's hopeful they can make good time as three Pro Heroes.

If they have target locations that Izuku is more likely to be at, it's not them scouring the city for him. Shota hopes and prays they find him fast. He doesn't like not knowing where Izuku is, and they've already spent enough time trying to make heads or tails of whatever the hell is going on.

Oboro's place in all this.

"Okay. Okay, Hizashi, you take the park Bakugou mentioned and that café he liked by Nighteye Agency. They should be around the same area. I'll check that café he used to work at and Dagobah beach. I'll send Nem to check the playground by the off-campus apartment Hitoshi mentioned, and I'll see if she's willing to wait there in case he goes home. Hitoshi, you stay up here just in case. Text us if he returns, got it?"

"Got it," the teen mutters dutifully, before hesitating. "You're not... like, mad at him, are you? I don't think he kept this a secret out of spite or anything... I mean, when he told me he was... like genuinely terrified of you guys finding out. I don't know why."

Hitoshi looks away, mouth pulling downwards in a frown, "I think he knows more about all of this, probably pieced everything together ages ago and kept it to himself, but... I don't know. He was so scared. Just... if you... if you *hurt* him, I'll never forgive either of you. Never. He's my best friend. He's the first person to honestly befriend me. The first person to not be scared of me, even knowing what I can do. I love you guys, but if you break him, I'll *never* forgive you."

"We never want to hurt him," Hizashi whispers, dry washing his face stressfully. "Nothing will change how we feel about the little Listener. I... I thought he *knew* that."

"We'll find him," Shota repeats. "We'll find him, and we'll try to

understand."

Shota scans the beach from the boardwalk, a sense of dread settling in his stomach because Izuku just isn't here. His heart drops into his stomach and he stills as he thinks.

The teenager hadn't been at the café he'd worked at; he hadn't gone home to the apartment off campus. Neither Hizashi nor Nemuri had texted saying they found him, and they hadn't heard anything from Hitoshi either.

It's been *hours* now.

Izuku was still missing.

Damnit.

Where the hell could the kid be?

Shota scans the beach one more time, the profanities he's about to heave out dying on his lips when he finally spots something promising. Sneakers. Red sneakers. Just the barest sliver of red peeking out from under the boardwalk a few feet away from where Shota's standing.

He draws in an unsteady breath as he moves swiftly to the stairs.

He tries not to let himself feel relieved— just because it looks promising, doesn't mean it is promising. Those could be anyone's shoes; that could be anyone sitting under the boardwalk.

His hands itch to tug his phone out of his pocket so he can tell his husband he found their kid, to offer that relief he knows they all need, him and Hizashi specifically, but there's no point until he's one-hundred percent certain that that's Izuku down there.

The only thing worse than their child disappearing, is being offered false hope that he's been found, only to be devastated all over again if Shota happens to be wrong and that's some other kid's shoes.

He takes the stairs two at a time until his boots are sinking in the sand at the bottom and he's rushing towards the red shoes. And oh, thank whatever deity exists out there that he sees his kid curled into a little ball, clutching his legs to his chest, with his face buried in his knees.

Izuku's curls are wind-mussed, and his features are completely hidden

in his knees.

Shota's heart shatters at the sight.

Shota sucks in another shaky breath as he finally tugs his phone from his pocket, sending out a quick text to the group chat between him, Hitoshi, Hizashi and Nemuri that he had eyes on Izuku.

He's careful not to say he's got him, because in all honesty, he *doesn't*. That chase just hours earlier had put everything into perspective for Shota. At the end of the day, Izuku is powerful, and he's smart, even when he'd letting panic lead him.

If Izuku wanted to disappear again, there's very little Shota could do to stop him, especially if Blackwhip aids him. He hopes the kid doesn't run again, but it's not out of the question.

He'd never seen such fear in Izuku's eyes as he'd... what had he done? Shoved away... a *ghost*? Shoved Oboro away? Oboro, who the kid had appeared to be quite familiar with. It hadn't looked like Izuku was unfamiliar with the ghost of Shota's best friend.

Shota tries not to think about that.

He still doesn't know what to make of that, and he truthfully wants to hear it from Izuku. Not Bakugou. Not Hitoshi. Not Midoriya Inko, or Izuku's medical files; just Izuku. He's the only one who can give them an honest answer. He's the only one who understands this completely.

Shota steps closer slowly, not wanting to scare the kid. Something unpleasant settles in his stomach as he realizes he's approaching his kid as if Izuku is some wounded animal that'll lash out and bolt away.

Izuku doesn't stir.

Shota wonders if the kid has even realized he was no longer alone. Shota wonders how long Izuku had been down here, the whipping breeze of the ocean washing over him and probably making him far colder than he should be. Shota's reminded of that night he'd found Izuku alone on the street in the middle of the night.

"When do I leave?"

Shota startles at the voice, frowning thoughtfully to himself when he glances back down at Izuku. His face is still buried in his knees and he doesn't appear to have noticed him, but he'd still spoken.

And it was just the two of them.

“And where do you think you’re going?” Shota can’t help but ask as he eases closer. “You know something I don’t, Kiddo? Care to enlighten me?”

Izuku finally lifts his head— not much, just enough for him to be able to settle his chin on top of one of his knees. Red, watery green eyes settle on Shota and Shota’s heart is in his throat as he realizes Izuku had been out here crying for *hours*.

He must’ve been so scared.

“You... you saw,” Izuku forces out, voice watery. He wipes his cheeks on his sleeve, bowing his head once again. “You guys saw him and that means... th-that means... you know. So, where are you going to send me? I know you’re going to want to get rid of me. Why wouldn’t you? S-so? When am I getting expelled? How long until my social worker comes to take me away because... b-because you don’t want me anymore...? Please, I can’t just sit in limbo again. Tell me up front.”

“Expelled? Get rid of you?” Shota repeats in utter surprise, “what are you talking about? You’re not going to get expelled; this has nothing to do with school, and we’re not going to— why the hell would we involve your social worker in something like this? If anything, Hizashi and I will be the ones in trouble for not keeping a better eye on you. Trust me, Izuku, you’re not going anywhere—”

“Don’t lie to me!” Izuku raises his voice, and it’s the first Shota thinks he’d ever heard Izuku yell at him. Izuku is quiet for just a second after the outburst, and then his voice has softened, wobbly and mistrusting, “please don’t lie to me. You *can’t* lie to me. I need the truth. I-I can’t live on false hope again. I can’t do it. Please, just tell me the truth up front.”

“I’m not lying, Izuku.”

“Then I don’t understand!” Izuku sounds so defeated, unfurling so he can lift his hands up to lace through his curls, obviously in distress, “*I don’t understand.* You... you *saw* him. I know you did. You saw him. You... you saw what I can do. You saw how much of a *freak* I am. You- you know who that was and I... w-why aren’t you mad? Be mad at me, Shota. I can... I can handle it. Just- just don’t lie to me! Don’t lull me into a false sense of security. I *can’t* go through that again. Please...”

“Izuku...” Shota’s mouth feels dry as he inches closer. He lets himself fall to his knees in front of the boy, glad for the sand there to break his descent. He doesn’t dare get any closer, but he’s glad Izuku had let him get this close. “You’re not a freak.”

“You can’t seriously be saying that,” Izuku fists at his eyes, letting out a humorless laugh, “you can’t say that after I— I don’t even know what I did today. After everything that happened in the hallway. He touched me and-and you both saw him, and you *know* him. I know you know him. He was your best friend— you've told me, and *he’s* told me. I've seen the *pictures*. I knew he could... that I could touch him, but I didn’t know he was *visible*. I don’t know what changed but you... and, and ‘zashi, you-you saw him. I know you did. You’re not supposed to. He’s not supposed to exist.”

“I’m the freak,” Izuku whimpers out brokenly, burying his face back in his knees, “I’m the weird, Quirkless freak who sees things he shouldn’t. It’s never going to go away. I was an idiot for thinking I could have this. Just... just leave me alone. You don’t have to bother with me anymore.”

“Izuku—”

“I don’t understand why you’re even here,” Izuku mumbles into his knees, as if he hadn’t even registered Shota had even spoken. “I don’t know why you’re even looking for me. You can go. I... I-I don’t expect you to stay.”

Shota doesn’t know where all this is coming from.

Had Izuku... had he really thought this? All this time? His entire life? Does it really think it’s true? This was an insecurity they hadn’t even realized existed. This secret he’d kept so close to his chest; a self-loathing they hadn’t realized the boy was struggling with.

Shota doesn’t know how to fix this.

Another humorless laugh comes from the boy, one that breaks off into a shaky sob, “why haven’t you gone? The cat’s out of the bag. You... you know. *You both know*. I understand if... if you want to stop fostering me. That’s what I get for getting too comfortable. I knew better, you know? I didn’t want to get comfortable, but you made it so easy. I didn’t want to get used to having a family, but I’m just selfish and I wanted it so badly. I didn’t want to *love* something when I knew it would all go away if I screwed up. It always does, I don’t know how to *keep* things. *No one* wants me. No one wants a freak—”

“You are *not* a freak,” Shota snaps, probably too hostile considering everything, but it does seem to snap Izuku out of his thoughts. Shota’s not sure he considers it a win as the boy wilts, bottom lip wobbling.

Shota sucks in a calming breath before continuing, “you’re not a freak. And you’re not losing anything, Izuku. We want you. Hizashi and I. Hitoshi. Yuuei, all your classmates and friends. Yagi. And... and *Oboro*... I think? I don’t understand enough to really— Look, we *all* want you. You’re so *important*, kid, and I don’t know how you can’t see that...”

“You’re my teacher,” the teen whispers, “you have to say that. I’m having a crisis, and I’m clearly emotionally unstable, so you’d say anything to calm me down—”

“I most certainly do not have to say anything,” Shota scoffs. “And I’m not your teacher right now, I’m your guardian. But you’re right. I’d say the same damn thing as a teacher, because you’re my student, you’re *my* kid. I don’t *have* to say anything, I’d *want* to. But right now, you’re my son. Not my student. And frankly, I’m so pissed off at the world for making you think this about yourself. I’m devastated you think so little of yourself and we never knew; that we never helped you. I have never been as scared as I was today, Izuku.”

“Seeing a ghost?” The boy asks meekly. “I’m sorr—”

“No,” Shota shakes his head, cutting the teen off easily, “watching you run from me. Seeing you so *terrified* of me. Of us. We’re supposed to be the people you can always trust. I was terrified when I couldn’t catch up to you or stop you without maybe accidentally hurting you. I was so scared when I couldn’t find you after you got over the fence. Hizashi has been in hysterics since I came home without you. You’re so important to us, Izuku, and nothing you say, or do— *what you can do*— will change that. We want you in our lives.”

“But I’m *different*—”

“What’s so wrong with being different?” Shota finds himself asking.

Izuku freezes, which Shota isn’t sure if it’s a good thing, or a bad thing, but he forces himself on anyways, “we live in a world of Quirks, Izuku. I don’t think there even is a *normal* in this day and age. You can walk down the street and see a mutated bear person, or a person with a turtle shell and you think nothing of it. You can see people with several eyes, or legs, or whatever else this world has to offer. Sir Nighteye could *glimpse into the future*. Hagakure is *invisible*. Ashido is

pink and *secretes acid*. Shoji has *dupli-arms*. What's so different about your Quirk? So, you can see ghosts—there's nothing wrong with that."

"It's not like those things though," Izuku whispers, grabbing a handful of sand granules. He lets them pour out of his fist like an hourglass, "you can see all those things. People understand those Quirks. Those are normal by Quirk standards. Mutations aren't the same things as what I... what I do. It just makes me weird. It scares people. Something no one else sees. Something that *scares* everyone else and is some— some dirty secret. No one *believes* me."

"Izuku, we saw the ghost of our dead high school friend," Shota reminds drily. "I believe you. Hizashi believes you. Hitoshi believes you to the point he *threatened* us. Even Bakugou believes you."

"Only because he can do things now!" Izuku argues furiously, wiping at his cheeks like he's annoyed by the overwhelmed tears still slipping down his cheeks. "It being active now doesn't change the fact that it wasn't! What about before, when Oboro couldn't interact with me? Before I even met him! Back when I was *diagnosed* Quirkless— and everyone kept telling me I'd grow out of it, that it wasn't real. That I was unwell; that I couldn't possibly see ghosts, because that's crazy!"

"And you know what?" Izuku sucks in a desperate breath, gaze flicking up to Shota's eyes as he offers a defeated smile, "I *thought* I was insane! For so long, Shota! That's all I knew. That's what everyone told me. It's how I grew up. And it's *logical*, when you think about it. Anyone would react the same way."

"What if I'd told you at the start of the school year, back before I could touch him, back before there was any proof that I wasn't just sick in the head?" Izuku's attention drops to his shoes, head bowing, "you'd have thought I was insane too. That's how it is. That's how it *always* is."

The boy is quiet for a second, no longer than a second, "and that would've been the last straw for you. And you can't even argue because you were already so against having me in your class. Oboro told me you'd planned on expelling me. You already didn't like my Quirk, you made that obvious during the apprehension test. So, had you found out I was crazy too? You would've canned me, Shota. I barely survived that first day even without everyone knowing I was a freak."

"Izuku—"

Izuku shakes his head, pushing on, “if everyone in my life thought I was crazy when they found out, why wouldn’t you too? My dad left because of it. My mom walked out on me because of it. Auntie and Uncle used to look at me like I had some kind of— I don’t know, *delicate mind* that would break if I was ever pushed. Until I *got better* and *stopped seeing them*. And Kacchan didn’t even believe me. He was my best friend and he still called me crazy. You were this teacher who I *knew* planned to expel me the second he could. You wouldn’t have believed me.”

“Hitoshi believed you when he found out.”

“Because Oboro pushed me on a swing!” Izuku hesitates, before adding, “and he saw a levitating book that Oboro was reading. I couldn’t talk my way out of that one without Hitoshi feeling like I did growing up. Like he was *insane*. I don’t want anyone to feel like I did.”

“What about Bakugou—”

“Oboro was so pissed off that he charged *through* Kacchan. He was trying to protect me. For fifteen years he *didn’t*. Those don’t count. Without actions backing me up, which were impossible before I... before we met, Oboro and I, no one would believe me.”

“I believe you.”

Izuku shoots Shota an unamused look, “you saw him.”

There’s a moment of silence.

“I’m tired of people telling me I’m crazy.” Izuku admits quietly. “I’m tired of letting people in and watching them *leave* when I turn out not to be normal. I’m tired of foolishly letting myself get comfortable, waiting on bated breath for it to all disappear when people finally figure me out. I was only trying to protect myself. What you don’t know can’t hurt you, right? I just wanted to be *normal*.”

Shota’s jaw clicks shut, and Izuku doesn’t seem too keen on adding anything else.

Shota doesn’t know what to do now.

He doesn’t know how to break through this wall of trauma Izuku has protecting him. How are you supposed to get through to someone, a child, who felt like they needed to isolate parts of themselves for safety?

Shota can't change what this kid has been through.

He can't go back in time and smack some sense into Izuku's parents, or doctors, or even the Bakugou family, as much as he wants to. What's done is done, and this hesitance the teenager has is a perfectly acceptable byproduct of that.

Shota can't change that.

He still knows far too little. He doesn't understand this.

But he does understand Izuku.

And he can't stand to see Izuku like this.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Shota breathes out quietly.

It feels like he's fighting a losing argument.

After a tense second, Shota continues, "I can't speak for what I *would've* done, but you proved yourself to me that day. I *was* going to expel you, but I didn't. You proved me wrong, and I admired that about you. You weren't expelled that first day because I saw something in you, and every day since I've been so glad that you managed to change my mind. You never cease to amaze me, Izuku. And now that I know the secret of your Quirk, I'm even prouder of you."

Shota hesitates, dry washing his face in an attempt to clear scrub some organization into his thoughts, "I— look, I haven't completely wrapped my head around you being able to *see* Oboro, of you... of you being *friends* with him when he's been gone for so long, but it's not some condemning thing. Frankly, I'm still coming to terms with the fact that ghosts even exists, Kid."

Izuku snorts a quiet laugh at that. "Not very logical, is it?"

"No," Shota bites back a small smile.

The humor fades when he forces himself back to the current situation, "it's not logical, but that doesn't mean it's not true. This is a part of you, Izuku, and it might take a second for us to wrap our heads around it, but that doesn't change how we feel about you. We've known you for so long— nearly a year now. This minor detail doesn't change anything for us. You're our kid. We're so happy with you around, and I... can't even think about you leaving kid. The thought

never crossed my mind once. I love you, okay?"

"You—" Izuku stills, wide eyes turning back to Shota, "you do?"

The man hesitates, unsure if he's made a miscalculation, but then he thinks of Hizashi and the night he'd told his husband about Izuku's Quirk.

'Just admit you love him already, grouchy pants!'

Shota sucks in a nervous breath and continues softly, "yeah. Of course, Kid. We both do. We love having you as our kid. We love having you as a member of our family. We love how close you and Hitoshi are; how you're the piece we didn't even know we were missing. We love how kind, and sweet and loyal you are. We love how easily you've become someone so important to us. *We* love you. *I* love you—"

Izuku is moving before Shota even realizes.

When had the kid gotten so fast?

One second, the kid is sat across from him, and the next, Izuku is wrapped around him, hugging him so tightly that Shota almost can't breathe. Shota blinks owlishly as he wraps his arms around the kid in return, waiting just a second for the boy to pull away if he wants before squeezing Izuku back just as tightly, just like he'd wanted to do since he'd spotted those red shoes.

He thinks Izuku might be crying again, can feel wetness on his neck where Izuku has buried his face between the skin and the capture weapon.

"I love you too," Izuku cries out, clutching at Shota. "I tried so hard *not* to. I can't lose this again, dad. I've already lost everyone else because I'm different, I can't lose you and Papa again. I tried so hard to be normal. I love you. I'm sorry. 'm so sorry. Please don't send me away. I can't do it. I can't do it *again*."

"Hey," Shota quiets his voice, lifting one hand off of Izuku's back to pet down his curls, "shh, it's okay. You're not losing us, okay? We're not sending you anywhere. Anyone who's left you, or mocked, or ridiculed you over something like this is an asshole, okay? You're perfect the way you are— super Quirk, ghosts and all. There is nothing you can do that will ever chase us away or make us send you away. You're stuck with us until you decide otherwise. We'd love to have you as long as you want to stay."

“I love you,” the boy warbles out, and Shota can just tighten his hold and hope he’s offering the comfort Izuku so desperately needs. He wishes Hizashi was here, he’s definitely the one out of the two of them that handles emotions better, but Shota is also a bit thankful he’d found the kid first.

Maybe it’s because Izuku was his first. His student, one of his 1-A gremlins that he’d give his life for without a thought. The problem child who’d come to him specifically for extra training with his Quirk. The kid who he’d found on the streets after being abandoned and brought home; the kid who’d somehow managed to weasel his way into Shota’s heart.

Izuku had been his long before Shota had taken guardianship over the kid.

“I love you too, sunshine,” Shota whispers into Izuku’s curls, hugging him back, “please, *please* never do this again, Izuku. Don’t ever feel like you need to run from us to protect yourself. You should never feel scared of us, and if you *do*, we’re doing something wrong as your guardians. We will never hurt you. I need you to remember that.”

“’m sorry,” Izuku sniffles, “I didn’t mean to… I-I wasn’t thinking, and everything just happened so suddenly and Oboro was—”

“I know,” Shota hushes, “it was a fear response. We know. I saw the look in your eyes and after… after all this, I think I understand you better now. I still hate that we prompted this. I’m sorry you’ve been holding onto this for so long. That you’ve been so scared and we never knew.”

“I never meant for you to find out,” Izuku whispers, pulling away just enough to look up at Shota’s face. “I was such a jerk to him. To… to Oboro. He told me everything and I… I said… He told me that you saw him today. You did, didn’t you? When you were called away from class? He’s… All for One made him into a Nomu.”

Shota’s heart stalls in his chest.

If he hadn’t of believed Izuku before, which he had, of course, he sure as hell would now.

There’s absolutely no way the kid could know about that.

Not unless… “He’s really been hanging around?”

“He never really left,” Izuku admits quietly. “I met him on the first day of school. I... thought he was a student when he followed you into the classroom but... y’know. He was the one who nudged me towards trusting you. I’m... glad he did.”

“That’s a long time,” Shota swallows. “I don’t know what to think about that.”

“Sorry,” Izuku whispers against Shota’s chest.

“No,” Shota gently pushes Izuku away, holding him at arm’s length so he can see his face, “don’t apologize for that idiot hanging around for over thirteen years. You’d think he would’ve had something better to do or something. Some sort of afterlife, maybe? I don't know. I’m actually not surprised he started clinging to you. You’re... a lot alike, you know? I didn't even believe in any of that but now... you’re really putting things into perspective, Kid.”

Shota feels his phone buzz in his pocket, and doesn’t even need to pull it out to know it’s Hizashi checking in. Hizashi, who must be desperate to see the kid unharmed after how he’d left.

“How do you feel about heading back?” Shota prompts quietly, “I think we should talk. All of us. Think you’re up for that? We just want to understand this. Understand *you*.”

“I... think so,” Izuku mutters, “you promise you’re not mad?”

“I promise,” Shota bows his head in a gentle nod. “I’m not mad, and Hizashi won’t be either. We were worried about you, not angry. I’m just glad you’re okay, and Hizashi will be too when he gets his hands on you. I hope you’re prepared to be smothered in affection.”

Izuku lets a small smile tilt onto his lips, “definitely ready.”

Oboro knew he’d messed up the second he’d called Izuku selfish.

The mere *second* that he’d muttered that word, he’d desperately wanted to take it back. He’d wanted to take it back and apologize profusely because he knows Izuku better than anyone.

And he knows Izuku is anything *but* selfish.

Izuku is all heart.

He’d give up anything if it meant helping someone else.

Time and time again, Oboro had watched, and even chided the teenager for never stopping to consider himself. Izuku was far too kind. Far too willing to put himself last for the sake of others.

And Oboro knew that.

Oboro *knew* Izuku's weaknesses and that's what he'd gone for in the heat of the moment.

He's not sure he'll ever be able to forgive himself for that. For using Izuku's weakness for his own gain— trying to guilt a boy who just wants to have a family and feel safe in his life.

He'd moved too fast. Looking back now, that's exactly where he'd gone wrong.

He'd let everything pile up on his shoulders, hadn't taken a second to process what he'd been through in what couldn't have been more than an hour, what he'd seen and felt in that prison cell, and *found out* about himself, and instead of having a conversation that he knows Izuku would've been more inclined to consider; asking calmly and talking all this through with the green-haired boy instead of springing it on him so suddenly and... and *demanding* and *accusing* him.

Oboro thinks the worst part about all of this is that he hadn't been able to help it.

He was so overwhelmed, and they weren't seeing eye to eye. He'd so desperately wanted Izuku to see this how he did. He'd been *in* his body. His body still existed somewhere out there, and there was a *chance* he could have it back.

Izuku had been so against it, and Oboro understands why. Doing as demanded would be outing this secret he kept so close to his chest. But Oboro hadn't been in the right state of mind to see that reason. Oboro was so upset and angry; only able to see one thing in that moment—

Getting his body back.

He hadn't considered Izuku. The teen was right. He hadn't stopped for even a second in his panic, and clarity— in the high of feeling his body again that had all but blinded him.

And that was wrong. That wasn't fair.

He knows what Izuku had been through.

He knows why Izuku had kept this secret so close to his chest, locked away with a padlock. Izuku had been traumatized by his father leaving when he was little, and his mother walking away without a word, and everyone in his life finding out and leaving him.

He was scared. And he had a right to be.

Izuku had come so far when it comes to Shota and Hizashi. Oboro has seen how hard Izuku has worked for this, how long it's taken him to come around to this idea of a family. He's so happy for the kid; he'd been nudging Izuku in this direction since finding out that he was neglected at home.

Anyone in Izuku's shoes would be terrified of losing something they'd always craved and never had a chance to have. Izuku was in a good spot, and what Oboro asked— what he *demanded*— was for Izuku to gamble with the happily ever after he'd always wanted on the off chance Oboro might be able to have his body back.

And Oboro thinks... had he gone about this in another way, Izuku might've actually considered the request. If Oboro had given him a moment to process this instead of jumping on him and letting his emotions do the talking, one frantically overwhelmed person asking something terrifying of another frantically overwhelmed person, Izuku would have wanted to help.

Izuku would *want* to help if he could.

That's what he does.

He helps people.

Oboro hadn't known how to fix this. He'd seen the heartbreak in Izuku's face as soon as the word had left his mouth. He hadn't known what to say as the teenager turned the word back around onto him, and Oboro had never felt more *selfish* in his life as what he'd said finally washed over him.

Logically, he knows it had been the heat of the moment talking. He doesn't think either of them were in the *right*, but neither of them was in the *wrong* either. Oboro thinks he has a right to ask, but Izuku also has a right to be scared of what this would stir up.

It was such a delicate situation that they'd both lost control of.

Emotions had gotten the better of them.

Oboro had tried to reach out— chest tightening with regret when Izuku pulled away from him in a way the teenager never has before. But he couldn't leave it now. Couldn't walk away from this how it was, couldn't let Izuku walk away from it how it was.

He'd reached out, and touched the teen like he always did and—

And the elevator dinged.

And then Shota and Hizashi were there all of a sudden, staring wide-eyed with mouths agape. Oboro had hardly had a second to think before Hizashi had muttered *his name* in shock, and Izuku was shoving him back forcefully, to which Oboro let himself stumble back in shock, before the teenager was taking off running.

Shota whipped past Oboro urgently in pursuit of Izuku, nothing but steal-toe work boots pounding on the stairs as he called desperately for Izuku. Hizashi seemed stunned into silence, unmoving.

And he wanted to follow Izuku.

He wanted to follow after him and keep an eye on him like he always does, but his legs feel rooted in place, and all he can do is stare at Hizashi, who is staring at him. At where he'd *been*.

Hizashi's voice calling out his name rings in Oboro's ears.

Hizashi had *seen* him.

Touching Izuku... it had made him visible. Izuku had made him visible. Hizashi and... and Shota had seen him because Izuku made him visible. They saw him. After so long, his friends had seen him— acknowledged him in a way he'd so desperately craved, especially after that moment he'd been unable to move in his own body, watching them break before his eyes.

For a while, Oboro tries to wrap his head around that.

He sits in the corner of the apartment when Hizashi finally shakes himself from his stupor and goes into the apartment to wait for Shota.

Oboro wishes he was surprised to see Shota returning without Izuku, but he's really not.

He tries to follow the conversation taking place, but he just can't help

but dissect his fight with Izuku now that he's not overcome by a tsunami of emotions. He tunes in when he hears Hitoshi calling his name— not *Ro*, but his real name.

He humors the kid by playing with the lights when prompted.

Hizashi's reactions would be amusing if Izuku was here too. If he hadn't felt cornered, so scared, in this secret and ran from everything. Oboro wishes he'd have followed the teenager now, but he also knows he's the last person Izuku would want to see after everything.

It's better if he waits here.

He can't cause problems here.

Oboro draws his knees up to his chest, comforted by Hitoshi's presence in the apartment as Shota and Hizashi leave to try and find the teen. Oboro wonders where Izuku would go when desperate.

He groans to himself, digging his nose into the gap between his knees.

He really hopes Izuku is okay. He hopes he didn't fuck their relationship up.

He'd never be able to forgive himself if he lost Izuku because of this...

Shota's arm is around Izuku's shoulders when they finally make it back onto campus. He's content tucked under his guardian's arm— is so genuinely relieved Shota doesn't hate him.

The dorms are quiet when they make their way into the dorm, and Izuku doesn't even need to look at a clock to know it's well past curfew. It's pitch-black outside, and the lack of peers and lights on in the common area of their dormitories means everyone had respected the curfew Shota enforced, even without the man around to enforce it, and were tucked away in their dorms for the night.

Izuku refuses to acknowledge the breath of relief he lets out when he realizes this.

He'd been worried about what his peers would say when he came back after being chased out of the dorms by their teacher like Izuku had committed some vile crime. He knows they'd be curious about that, but he's so glad he can worry about that later.

He's already worried about too much.

And that's honestly the least of his worries.

Shota guides Izuku into the elevator, and they ride up silently. Shota faintly tightens his grip around Izuku when the doors open on the top floor, and it feels like the man is silently trying to comfort him.

Izuku sucks in a nervous breath, taking it for what it is.

They hardly make it in the door when Izuku is suddenly engulfed in someone's arm, tugged tightly to someone's, definitely Hizashi's, chest. Arms wrap around him, and he's squeezed desperately, nearly to the point he can't breathe— but there's something so comforting about someone wanting to hold him so desperately.

"Sweetheart," Hizashi coos, voice sounding wrecked with emotion.

Guilt twists at Izuku's heart as he finally lifts his arms to return the embrace, tears welling in his eyes.

"I was so, so worried, Darlin'." Hizashi continues gently, "you're never allowed to do that again, y'hear? No running off without telling us where you're going. I don't care what's going through the clever little head of yours, you can't ever run from us like that again, okay? Never think you need to resort to running when it comes to Shota and I, okay?"

"'m sorry," Izuku snivels quietly as he buries his face in Hizashi's chest. "'m so sorry, Papa."

Hizashi tenses for just a second, and Izuku tenses in response.

Had Hizashi not—

Did he not want Izuku to—

Then, all at once, the man lets out the tension bleed out of his frame as he blows out a shaky breath, burying his nose in Izuku's curls as he tightens his hold comfortingly. His voice sounds even more emotional when he continues, "I know, sunshine. It's okay. You're okay. We're not mad. Don't be sorry, okay?"

Izuku lets his own tension melt away, holding Hizashi back tighter.

Hizashi clutches at him for a good couple seconds, and Izuku doesn't have the heart to pull away. He doesn't even know if he wants to pull away. He'd run not knowing what his relationship with his guardians

would look like when they finally knew what he was.

He'd never in a million years thought they'd be *hugging* him after finding out. He was prepared for a lot of outcomes when his secret came to light but this... this certainly wasn't one of them.

"Where's Hitoshi?" Shota's voice is what breaks them from their embrace.

Hizashi pulls away from the hug but snakes his hand into Izuku's own and gives a light squeeze as if Hizashi can't bear to not have a point of contact between them. It's almost as if he thinks if he's not touching Izuku in some way, he could disappear without a trace.

Maybe him running had affected his guardians more than he'd first assumed.

"I sent him downstairs at curfew," Hizashi explains. "It's not like he needs to be a part of this talk. He already knows more than we do, doesn't he? *Dorm jail* for the smart mouth who tried to scare me when I was already fragile!"

"...what?" Izuku can't help but ask.

"Don't worry about it," Shota snorts out, flapping a dismissive hand. "How do you feel about talking? We can wait, if you'd like, but I don't think this is something that'll get easier the longer you wait."

"But we'll do this all on your time, sunshine!" Hizashi adds hastily, giving Izuku's hand another light squeeze as if to add emphasis to how supportive he sounds. "Whenever you're ready."

Hopefulness blossoms in his chest.

Maybe... this won't be as big of a disaster as it usually is. He hadn't wanted to hang on to any false hope that Shota and Hizashi might be different than his mom, dad and everyone else who ever learned his secret, but maybe he was *wrong*?

Shota leads them both into the living room after Izuku nods cautiously.

He freezes when he spots Oboro.

The ghost jolts up so he's standing when they enter, freezing just as the teenager had when he and Izuku make eye contact. There's a tense

second where neither of them moves— like a weird staring contest of sorts.

“Izuku...” Oboro finally croaks out, “I’m so sorry about what I said.”

There’s a prompting squeeze on his hand that draws Izuku from his own stupor, gaze shooting to Hizashi. “He’s...” the man hesitates when he has Izuku’s attention. “He’s here, isn’t he? Oboro?”

Izuku swallows roughly, bowing his head in a nod.

“Yeah,” Izuku’s mouth feels dry as he admits. “He’s... on the love seat. Don’t sit on him. It’s cold for you and he flails. It’s whole thing.”

“Oh wow,” Oboro breathes out, plopping back into his seat with an awed expression. “This is... happening. This is happening *fast*. You’ve never talked so openly about me. You’ve never warned people about where I am and— wait, I do not flail!”

Izuku ducks his head, biting back a laugh.

Oboro clears his throat, drawing Izuku’s attention back, “are you... sure you’re ready for this, Izuku? This is a big step... I know I was pushy earlier but... I never meant to push you, you know?”

“I know,” Izuku hopes he offers a crooked smile, but it might be more of a spooked grimace. “There’s no going back now. Um... how do we do this? What do you guys... know?”

Shota and Hizashi are both staring intently at the loveseat, like Oboro will suddenly materialize before them at just speaking about him. Izuku knows it won’t happen, and the ghost is wisely keeping his distance for now. He seems beyond excited that they’re even looking in his direction though, that they have a faint idea that he’s there with them.

“Let’s sit,” Shota suggests slowly, gaze never flicking away from the loveseat. “Hizashi and I will take the couch and you... wherever you feel comfortable, Izuku.”

Izuku chooses to perch on the coffee table between everyone. He feels comfortable there— not overwhelmed or smothered or trapped, whether by a clingy ghost or caring guardians.

“Well...” Hizashi bites his lip, glancing at Shota. “Where did you meet him?”

“At school,” Izuku informs quietly, just as he had when telling Shota at the beach. “He followed Shota into the classroom, and I thought... he looks just like a regular student to me. I was wrong. I swear, I didn’t know he was your friend! I thought... I don’t know what I thought, but I didn’t figure out you guys used to be friends until you guys took me in, and I saw the picture of the three of you.”

“And he’s been...” Hizashi’s gaze flicks to the loveseat where he can’t see anything, “he’s just been around? All this time?”

“Y-yes,” Izuku nods slowly, interlacing his hands together in his lap. “He never... left. He’s been... keeping an eye on you guys and he’s been watching out for me too. Has been since we met. I don’t think... I’d be here if Oboro wasn’t around.”

Hizashi sucks in a fearful breath as Shota swallows anxiously.

“At the USJ...” Shota starts cautiously. “He was there, wasn’t he?”

Izuku chances a glance at Oboro. “He was. He... was trying to help you and when he couldn’t... when the Nomu came for me he... I don’t know. I used his Quirk, maybe? That's the first time we ever touched, and then his Quirk... I-I've never been able to do that before! Honest! But it happened, and neither of us knew what happened and... well...”

“The clouds,” Hizashi blinks owlishly, processing. “Mineta and Asui told me about the clouds. And then Shota, I don’t know if you remember this, but you told me you saw Oboro with Izuku. You were pretty high on the pain meds but... I don’t know, I never stopped thinking about it. And you... you saw clouds too. Oh my God.”

Izuku blinks wide-eyed at Shota, “you saw Oboro?”

“I didn’t know what I saw,” Shota admits awkwardly, “I had very serious head trauma and I thought... I just saw what I *wanted* to see. Oboro watching out for my kids. If I couldn’t have been there, I was glad he was. I don’t remember anything after that.”

“The clouds...” Hizashi continues curiously, slowly piecing each incident involving Oboro together. “The Sports Festival. The clouds were there too. Izuku, was he there that day too?”

“Ah, right, that one was completely on me,” Oboro says sheepishly.

“All of them are completely on you,” Izuku retorts with a huff. Izuku pauses, glancing back at his guardians before continuing sheepishly,

“that time was an accident too. Hitoshi’s Quirk... Oboro panicked a little when I was under his control, and he tried to catch me before I could fall. We couldn’t really control it. It works a bit like Blackwhip. Or... it did at the beginning. It was only overwhelming emotions that activated it. Fear, mostly.”

“Okay,” Hizashi lets out a slow breath, as if trying to calm himself down. “I really don’t like the thought of either of you being scared enough to activate a Quirk neither of you knew existed.”

Shota grimaces in agreement. “What about the night I found you, Izuku?”

Oboro winces as Izuku turns to look at him, “oh, uh, yep. Definitely me. I led him to you using streetlamps. It wasn’t my finest work, but it got the job done. It’s not my fault the idiot followed the lights.”

“You lured him from patrol by flickering streetlights?” Izuku gapes in surprise.

This is news to him.

Oboro had never really explained how he’d brought Shota to Izuku that night.

It made sense though.

Hizashi whips around to face a guilty looking Shota, “you followed weird, random lights leading you off your patrol route in the middle of the night without any backup? Shota, babe, love of my life, you’re too smart to act this stupid.”

“I found the kid,” Shota huffs, “what does it matter now anyways? Like you wouldn’t follow a runway of lights directing you somewhere. I barely even believed it at the time.”

“Yeah,” Oboro crosses his arms over his chest, “it worked out in the end anyways. And how else did you expect me, a ghost, to lead someone who can’t see me to you? Don’t dwell on it. Bygones, or whatever, right?”

Izuku snorts a laugh, “I can see how you two were best friends.”

“He sided with Shota, didn’t he!” Hizashi cries out. “Typical!”

Izuku just laughs harder.

Shota and Hizashi exchange a fond look that Izuku only sees the out of the corner of his eye, but something about that look had relief settling in his chest.

“Okay,” Shota cocks his head, “what about Hosu. The hypothermia... it wasn’t really One for All that hurt you, was it? Yagi seemed surprised by that, like he hadn’t thought such a thing was even possible.”

Oboro wilts guiltily, and Izuku can’t help but wince.

“Um, w-well, technically it played a *part* in it,” Izuku admits awkwardly.

He glances down at his hands, “First and I, uh, the first wielder of One for All, who I can sometimes see because of the whole ghost thing, he, um, helped me understand what happened. It was a bit of everything. Todoroki-kun's ice, Oboro using me my energy and the vestiges, they’d been feeding off of me too while I was with Gran Torino. Just...”

“Cold overload?” Hizashi suggests quietly.

“Yeah,” Izuku lets out an awkward laugh. “Basically.”

“That explains why Yagi never knew,” Shota adds thoughtfully. “He doesn’t know about this original Quirk, does he?”

“No one knows,” Izuku shakes his head guiltily. “No one but Kacchan and Hitoshi. And my family, of course. And Kacchan’s family, but they think it went away because I never mentioned it. You already know none of that ended well.”

“We know now,” Hizashi smiles softly, “and we’re not going anywhere. No one else needs to know, but we’ll protect you and stand by you even if you do want to tell people.”

Izuku offers a tiny half-smile in response.

Shota clears his throat, “I was also wondering about that fight between Yagi and All for One? Was Oboro there for that at all? When you... when the League had you and Bakugou?”

“Well... I think he was with Hitoshi?” Izuku admits with a frown, “he wasn’t with me when I got pulled through the portal, so he didn’t know where I was either. ‘toshi said Oboro helped him, and Oboro sorta told me what happened. As soon as he found me, he was with

me. And I... made him use his Quirk. He made that storm cloud."

"He... made a storm cloud?" Hizashi's attention flicks to the loveseat in surprise, "I've never seen him make anything but white clouds. That's... wow."

Shota looks equally as bewildered at that.

"I, um, I think One for All might play a role in that?" Izuku bows his head anxiously, "Yagi-san told me the energy stockpiling nature of One for All makes other Quirks stronger when they're melded into it. Like... um, Blackwhip. I think, maybe, since Oboro uses me, which is my Quirk, and I'm bound to One for All by DNA... I think it might make him stronger too just by relation?"

Shota and Hizashi exchange a look, "that makes sense."

"We don't know very much about your super Quirk," Hizashi adds quietly.

Izuku nods, unsure what to say in response to that. He's sure admitting that he doesn't know much more about One for All is not a smart move right now, so he keeps the thought to himself.

"Was there... anything else you guys were wondering about?"

"What about your supposed guardian angel that Kota was talking about after the training camp attack?" Shota arches an eyebrow in question, "was that Oboro?"

"Kota was talking about a guardian angel? I don't know if I'd call him an angel," Izuku admits awkwardly, ignoring Oboro's offended *'Hey!'*, "but probably him."

"How about that *friend* of yours Eri keeps talking about?"

"Oboro," Izuku admits sheepishly. "We had a tea party to help her settle in. People say kids are very in-tune with spiritual stuff. I was just as surprised, honestly."

"What about your inattentiveness in class?"

"He's a *distraction*, Dad," Izuku says seriously, lips twitching up into a smile, "from day one. That's not my fault. He's a very bad influence when I'm trying to focus."

"That's a little over dramatic, 'zuku," Oboro whines. "What are you

trying to do? Get me in trouble?"

"And the arcade? How you knew about the cat eraser in the story?"

"He was there too, Papa." Izuku glances back at Oboro, whose cheeks puff out as if he's offended by that cat eraser event all over again. "I, uh, got that story in detail. He's still a little offended."

"The cat plushie?"

"Oboro picked it."

Shota and Hizashi both suck in surprised breaths after the rapid-fire questions.

"So he's just..." Hizashi's tone is misty, as he drags his palms down his face, "he's always been around? Whenever you're around... so is he? Always watching over us and looking out for you? He's been so close all this time, and we never even knew."

Izuku nods before looking between the two of them cautiously, "you're both taking this surprisingly well..."

"We can't change this," Shota offers, though he does look like this is all starting to get overwhelming. "Trust me, Kid, we're still wrapping our heads around this and trying not to freak out, but only because it's..." his voice breaks off, "because it's *Oboro*."

"I'm sorry," Izuku offers again.

"No, no," Hizashi dry washes his face in his hands before smiling softly at Izuku, "nothing to apologize for, sunshine. This is actually... good. I'm surprised, don't get me wrong, and I am trying hard to process this but... I've missed him so much, ya'dig? I saw him. You... let us see him again. He's *there* when we thought he was gone. You're just... you're a blessing, baby."

"A blessing?" Izuku swallows as tears spring to his eyes.

He's been called a lot of things.

A blessing is not one of them.

Izuku fists hard at his eyes in an attempt to stem off the tears. It doesn't really work. He lets out a broken laugh anyways, wiping his face once again, "that's a new one, Papa."

“A new one that suits you perfectly, sweetheart,” Hizashi says fondly.

Hizashi pauses, looking back at the loveseat thoughtfully. He stares for a long second, as if trying to see, or even sense Oboro there, before his eyes return to Izuku.

“Do you... think you could do it again, sunshine?”

“Do what?” Izuku asks dumbly.

“Make him visible. I just...” Hizashi lets out an almost humorless laugh, rubbing at the back of his neck, “I just need to see him again if you can make it happen. Don’t hurt yourself, of course. And... don’t force yourself either. I just...”

Izuku hesitates.

He studies Hizashi, before his calculating gaze jumps to Shota, who looks interested and hopeful, before finally letting his gaze settle back on Oboro, who hasn’t moved from the loveseat.

Izuku turns back to Oboro, holding his hand out as an invitation for the ghost to take it if he chooses too. For a long second, the ghost just stares at the offering, before his gaze flicks up to Shota and Hizashi. He inches close until he’s settled on the table beside Izuku.

Oboro sets his hand in Izuku’s, and Izuku interlaces their fingers easily.

Izuku knows it has worked again when both his guardians draw in surprised breaths.

Oboro seems to have realized that as well as his eyes water.

“Hiya, ‘zashi,” Oboro offers a wobbly smile, “hey, Sho.”

Both men are staring at him, tears welling in their eyes.

A long second of silence drags on until Oboro clears his throat, “can I just be the first to congratulate you both on your new son? C’mon, where’s the *smiles*, boys? You know just as well as I that everyone’s been waiting for the kid to *finally* christen you two into parenthood with a *Dad* and *Papa*? Tell me I’m not the only one who noticed the swift transition?”

Izuku sputters, whipping around to scowl at Oboro, while Shota lets out a humored breath, wiping at wet eyes and Hizashi breaks out into

a watery laugh as he runs his palms down his cheeks.

“Oboro!” Izuku squeaks out in embarrassment, “you waited until now, now that you’re visible and they can see and hear you to say that? You’re the worst!”

“Well yeah,” Oboro snorts, his own voice coming out a little emotional now, “it needed to be said. You’ve only been worried about it for months~ I told you they’d like it, didn’t I? Look at that: tears. Just like I said.”

“I don’t think they’re crying because of that, dude,” Izuku mutters under his breath.

“You’ve been worried about calling us dad and papa?” Hizashi coos kindly through his tears, “awh, sweetheart, you can call us whatever you want! But we’re more than happy to be your dad and papa!”

Izuku kinda wishes the ground would open up and swallow him whole, but he somehow manages to shove aside the embarrassment.

It takes some effort, but Hizashi seems to force his gaze away from Izuku and back onto Oboro. Hizashi stares at Oboro for a long second, and Izuku wonders what the blonde is thinking. He wonders what both of his guardians are thinking actually. This is a lot to process, even for Izuku, and he's always known about the ghosts.

Hizashi's features soften even more, if that’s even possible, “can... we touch him?” he asks on bated breath, “is he... solid for us too?”

“I... don’t know,” Izuku makes a winded sound, glancing calculatingly over at Oboro, who looks just as intrigued. He never thought they’d get this far— hadn't even considered it. Until that afternoon, they hadn’t even known Oboro was visible. This is a new level of experimental for them.

“I just,” Hizashi sniffles, “I really want to hug him.”

“Bring it in, buddy,” Oboro prompts, eyes wide at the thought of hugging his friends again after all these years. “Just... don’t be to upset if it doesn’t work, okay? Maybe Izuku’s the only one with that special touch, you know?”

“Don’t say that about our kid, idiot,” Shota scoffs out a wet laugh.

Hizashi is the first to cross the room, bending down and then... then

his arms wrap around Oboro. The ghost inhales in surprise, before he's clutching back at his friend. Izuku's hand is dragged along with Oboro's when he wraps around the blonde. Izuku doesn't mind the odd angle and weird muscle strain.

"Oboro," Hizashi whimpers into the ghost's shoulder, "I missed you."

"I bet I missed you more," the ghost whispers back. Oboro turns his head to the side, offering Shota another wobbly smile, "you're gonna let me get all the action from your husband? Bring it in, dude. C'mon, don't you know it's rude to leave a ghost hanging? I've been deprivvved!"

Shota snorts out a noise that sounds suspiciously like a cry as he joins them too, wrapping his arms around Oboro as well until the hug between the school friends is more a tangle of limbs.

Izuku's chest feels warm as he watches, keeping quiet so as to not disturb them.

The ghost all but melts into their embrace, smiling so wide Izuku doesn't know how it doesn't hurt. Oboro buries his face between Shota and Hizashi's shoulders, drawing in a shaky breath as if breathing them in after so long.

"I never thought I'd get to hug you two again," Oboro finally mutters, squeezing at Izuku's hand as he clutches harder at his friends, "you two really know how to pick a son, don't you?"

"A blessing chooses you," Hizashi warbles into Oboro's shoulder, squeezing tighter. "Not the other way around, buddy."

Chapter End Notes

> I'm going to try to aim for 50 chapters of this fic. That seems like a good place to end this. I won't update the chapter count until I'm certain that's the end, but just be warned that's the idea at this point! It's both exciting and upsetting that this fic is coming to an end :(
>
> Anyways! I hope you guys liked this chapter! There was a lot to cover, and I jumped around writing it in an attempt to get it done fast, so editing isn't that good, probably. I didn't want to to get too repetative to what's already happened in the fic, but I thought it would be nice for Shota and Hizashi to understand that Oboro's been hanging around the entire time. Still, sorry the end is a bit

dialogue heavy!

As always, thank you so much for taking the time to read! I appreciate each and every one of you, and I'm very grateful for everyone who's stuck around and interacted with this fic. Comments are very greatly appreciated-- definitely my favorite part of updating! <3

Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Hello, hello!

Back again with another chapter for you guys! I really liked how this one came out, so I hope you guys do as well! Also, I did most of this in like four hours and I didn't edit much more then reading through a couple times, so excuse any mistake you may find! Also! This fic is now over 20,000 kudos! I'm speechless, honestly! Thank you all so much!!

We also got a couple new pieces of fanart for this fic! The first comes from @brewsbrownies on Tumblr! I love the adorable art of our favorite boys at the café from a few chapters back! Our second piece of art comes from @give-art-a-chance over on Tumblr! I adore the cute little scene from the first chapter! I absolute love the art you guys send, so thanks for taking the time to make them! I'm glad this fic inspires others! Stop by and give the artists some love if you feel so inclined! <3

As always, I hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku ends up staying awake quite late the night Shota and Hizashi finally find out about his I-see-your-dead-best-friend-who-is-also-my-best-friend-now secret.

He's exhausted after the emotional rollercoaster that is breaking completely at the seams in fear of his world shattering apart for a second time, and then being stitched back up by kindness from two people, two *parents*, he'd never had the luxury of having in his life before.

He'd sorta wanted to sleep, but he also hadn't wanted to get in the way of the reunion between three best friends who thought they'd never see each other again. Separated by the one thing that was supposed to be forever: death.

Shota and Hizashi still ask lots of questions, and Oboro, thankfully, takes the lead in answering.

"What about your birthday? We had Izuku at that point... The candle

__”

“I loved the cake! I have never loved anything as much as I loved that cake!” Oboro had cheered loudly, “I blew the candle out. Well, I tried, but when it didn’t go out, I just pinched it. I guess I had enough energy to suffocate the flame. Thank you, guys. It was the best birthday.”

“I *knew* he blew out his candle!” Hizashi accused loudly, whipping around to face a defeated looking Shota, “I told you so! You called me crazy, but I hoped it was him! Even if it was just a nice thought! And it *was* him! Awh, that makes my heart so happy! You’ve definitely gotta lighten up and stop being so critical, Shocchan. Let yourself feel joy, even if it’s illogical!”

“Yeah, yeah,” the underground Hero had huffed under his breath, “you were right, I was wrong. The ghost did in fact blow out his birthday candle. Seriously though, who would’ve thought that? It *is* illogical.”

“And so is having a ghost,” Oboro countered playfully, “yet here we are! Gotta take the *reality* with the *illogical-ness*, dude. Can’t have one without the other, even if it’s crazy.”

“I’m guessing Izuku planned that whole thing with you in mind?”

Izuku smiled softly at Shota, forcing himself back to conversation for a moment, “I... never actually met any of my grandparents, but... I had met Oboro. I’m sorry I lied. I just... figured you all could use something different. And I knew Oboro needed it too.”

“Problem Child,” Shota had huffed fondly.

“No, our sweetheart little Sunshine,” Hizashi had corrected with an adorning smile shot in Izuku’s direction. “Always one step ahead of everyone else, aren’t you, Darling?”

Falling asleep on Oboro’s shoulder hadn’t been in his plans, but when the ghost wakes him by a gentle squeeze of his hand and a feather-like nudge of his shoulder that lightly jostles Izuku’s head, where they still hadn’t pulled apart in hours, Izuku lets Shota and Hizashi usher him to bed like normal.

He’s more aware of the ghost trailing after him, perching on the edge of the desk as he watches his two school friends all but tuck the teenager into bed, and Izuku is basically out after that.

He's so glad it's the start of winter break.

That means he doesn't have to get up early for school, because he knows he'd be dead on his feet the following morning if that were the case.

He sleeps in the apartment upstairs, not wanting to be sneaking around the dorms in the early hours of the morning, nor to possibly be caught by his classmates who'd no doubt want an answer for why he'd been running from their teacher, genuinely terrified.

When he wakes up the following morning, well, it's closer to noon at that point, Izuku is surprised to find himself alone in the bedroom. His gaze flicks around the room, finding Nemo perched at the edge of the bed, but not finding his ghost friend.

For a moment, one single second as he glances blearily around the room, Izuku forgets the events that transpired the night prior.

That... his guardians had seen Oboro.

Oboro who clung to those two men, had follow them and had desperately wanted to have had he'd lost the day he'd passed away, had finally gotten to talk to them, to hug them, after nearly fourteen years.

Izuku isn't completely sure how to feel about everything, but he's also... he's so relieved.

Not only had they not wanted to get rid of him instantly, but they also hadn't been angry with him for keeping Oboro a secret. They hadn't cared he was different. They'd told him they loved him. He had people who loved him. He had parents who loved him.

He had... he had a dad and a papa who loved him.

He's not even sure he can remember anyone telling him they loved him. Not so honestly, so easily.

He's sure his mother used to tell him when he was a baby, before he could recognize or really understand, but as he'd grown older, she'd put that distance between them. He honestly can't remember her ever saying she loved him.

And there was no one else in his life either.

He knows auntie and uncle cared about him, and Kacchan to a degree as well, but they'd never admitted to loving him. There's just something different about someone acting like they love you, to someone admitting it aloud.

Shota and Hizashi had done both, he realizes.

Looking back now that he has that confirmation.

They'd always acted like they loved him, even if he'd never let himself get comfortable enough to really consider what was in front of him—from the gentleness that only he got to see, to the fierce protectiveness, and the genuine interest in Izuku's wellbeing. To feeding him, clothing him, putting a roof over his head and providing comfort when he needed it most.

To being there when he needed them. Being there before he even knew he needed them.

Maybe that's what a parent is really supposed to do.

No one ever...

But Shota and Hizashi *had*.

And they didn't even have any obligation to do so.

They'd taken him in out of the kindness of their hearts, as his teachers who were looking out for him in the early days, and they'd slowly taken him in as their own as time went on.

That's more than he can say about his mother.

He *was* hers and she never... she'd never treated him like his guardians have.

Izuku heart pounds fondly in his chest as he clutches his stuffed cat to his chest, burying his nose in the top of cat's head, between its ears.

They loved him.

He pushes himself up out of bed when he finally managed to slow the fondness swirling in his chest and making his heart beat like crazy. The apartment is relatively quiet as he sneaks out of his room.

The living room is empty, sans Fish who is snoozing on the back of the couch, but Izuku hears voices when he draws closer to the kitchen.

He's both surprised, yet unsurprised to see Hitoshi perched at the table, a mug of coffee in front of him.

Oboro is seated in the chair across from him, a single empty plate on the table before him as if to mark that the seat is taken. The ghost is positively beaming when his attention shoots up to Izuku at hearing the movement.

"Good morning, my miracle of a best friend!" Oboro cheers, "Hizashi gave me a plate! I'm a part of the atmosphere! This is my spot now, and I'm not giving it up! My chair and my plate, and it's all thanks to you!"

"Power to ya," Izuku snickers, drawing in both Hitoshi and Hizashi's attention.

"Good morning, Sunshine!" Hizashi smiles fondly. "I'm going to assume Oboro is here, and that's who you're talking to. He is here, right? I put a plate down just so he'd know he was welcome at the table."

"I have not moved since," the ghost grins dutifully, as if watching his plate was an assigned job. The ghost glances fondly over at Hizashi. "Tell him that. Thank him for me. Or! Or, let me do it! Come hold my hand! Oh! Wait! No, you can sit in my lap, I'll share my seat with you! Then we don't have to worry about holding hands!"

"I kindly decline that offer," Izuku snickers as the ghost deflates with a pout. "You made it weird, dude. And he's been in the chair since you put the place down, Papa. He appreciates the gesture."

Izuku waits on bated breath to see if the man makes any sort of reaction, but he seems unphased. Hitoshi on the other hand, whips his attention to Izuku in surprise, eye wide as he studies Izuku.

The green haired teen shrugs sheepishly as he plops down into one of the seats between Oboro and Hitoshi.

"Awh!" Hizashi grins brightly, looking back over his shoulder. His gaze falls to Izuku first before flicking hopefully to what looks like to him an empty chair, "that makes me so happy. You're always welcome, Buddy!"

Izuku smiles softly, only to frown hard when something hits his arm.

"Ow," Izuku turns to Hitoshi in offense, rubbing at the sore spot,

“what was that for?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” the purple-haired teen cocks an eyebrow, expression nothing but a deadpan, “maybe keeping the fact that your ghost friend *Ro* just so happened to be my pseudo uncle *Oboro* a secret from me?”

“Oh,” Izuku breathes out sheepishly, “ah, right. Um. Sorry about that. But, uh, that, um, was exactly why I didn’t tell you? You know him. I’ve... seen the pictures. I didn’t want to freak you out anymore than I already had and I... didn’t want to risk you telling anyone else who he was either... I’m self-aware enough to know that *that* is a bit weird.”

“All those times he’d bullied me,” Hitoshi pouts, “you’re a cruel man, Shirakumo. You always looked so innocent in the pictures, and the stories my uncles told me. All lies.”

“He’s so dramatic,” Oboro snickers into his hand. “Let’s shock him. Hold my hand. Pleassse? C’mon! He knows I exist, and I think it’s long overdue that I actually meet him, eh? I wanna see the look on his face when I become visible! It’s my new favorite thing!”

Izuku relents without much thought.

There’s no harm in it, so he leans back just enough to see Oboro’s hand snaking towards him under the table so Hitoshi won’t be able to see Izuku reaching for nothing and figure them out.

The teen bites back a smile as he subtly slips his hand into Oboro’s.

“Holy fuck!” Hitoshi squeaks out, chair screeching against the floor as he pushes himself back, gaze locked on the smug looking ghost. He doesn’t look scared, not really, more so startled.

Oboro’s elbow is leaned on the tabletop, chin in his palm as he smiles teasingly at Hitoshi. His eyes are bright with mirth, clearly amused by Hitoshi’s reaction. His smile turns more humored as he angles his head innocently in Hitoshi’s direction. “You look like you’ve seen a *ghost*, pseudo nephew.”

“Oh fuck off, Ro,” Hitoshi sneers without any real heat, easing back into his chair as he glares daggers at the ghost before his attention flickers to Izuku. “Izuku, you jerk. He planned that and you played along, didn’t you? I thought we were friends!”

“Guilty,” Izuku admits, lifting his hand (and Oboro’s) up to set on the

table between them. His hand had started to go numb bent at the odd angle and just hanging. “You kind of deserved it. You did punch me.”

“You deserved *that*!” Hitoshi huffs back accusingly, unimpressed. “You’re both more insufferable now that you’re together and are capable of pulling off that dirty little ‘*now you see me*’ trick. I fear for mankind with the two of you running around together. You can't just jump scare someone like that! I almost had a heart attack! What if I had heart issues, huh? Uncle ‘zashi, they’re being mean to me!”

“You did deserve it,” the blonde snickers, lacking any sympathy for the teenager. “And you *don’t* have heart issues. That’s just payback for you scaring me yesterday! Rotten teenagers who try to scare people deserve to get the shit scared out of them in return! What goes around comes around, bud.”

Hizashi’s expression softens as he looks towards Oboro, the ghost’s own gaze flicking to his school friend as if sensing his gaze. Hizashi’s eyes water, but he’s quick to rub the tears away, instead offering a bright smile, “hey, buddy. Good to see you again.”

"Heya, ‘zash,” Oboro chimes back, his own expression completely fond. “Not gonna lie, you’re taking this a lot better than I thought you would.”

“I thought this was a dream,” Hizashi admits with a strange sounding laugh. Maybe a bit watery, or possibly even disbelieving still, “I actually... half expect to wake up and for everything to go back to how it was before, ya’dig? Before...”

“Yeah,” Oboro swallows roughly, thumb stroking over Izuku’s knuckles thoughtlessly, “yeah, I get it. Same here. I... half expected it to have been a dream, and then you... you gave me a plate and... and a spot at the table and it was like the most heartening thing you could’ve done, and I knew then it was legit. It’s all real though, ‘zashi, and it’s all thanks to Izuku! Our special little boy!”

“*Special little boy*,” Hitoshi snickers under his breath into his mug of coffee, earning himself a sharp glare from Izuku. Izuku kicks at Hitoshi’s shin under the table, but the purple-haired teen doesn’t seem offended in the least.

“Mine and Sho’s special little boy, pal,” Hizashi corrects teasingly, offering Oboro and Izuku both a crooked smile. “Finder's keepers.”

Izuku pouts, lifting his attention to Hizashi and Oboro.

“I… don’t think I’m anyone’s special little boy?” Izuku grimaces, going unheard as the two school friends glare playfully at one another over… over Izuku? He doesn’t mention the fact that he doesn’t really want to be anyone’s special little boy…

“Hey, woah,” Oboro straightens his back playfully, going on as if Izuku nor Hitoshi had said anything at all, “if you wanna get technical, I followed him home on, like, the second day of school, so he was mine first! If I’m not mistaken, and I’m totally not, you two didn’t acquire the kid until weeks later, and that’s only after *my* interference! Case in point, Izuku is my special little boy!”

“You… followed him home?” Shota’s voice interrupts from the doorway, brow furrowed. “Doesn’t hold the weight you think it does, Shirakumo. Just makes you sound like a stalker. And please, for the love of all things holy, do not call our child anyone’s *special little boy*. That sounds awful coming from both of you, if you’re not careful you’ll get flagged or something, saying things like that.”

“I guess Shota gets the braincell today,” Hitoshi snickers under his breath to Izuku, who promptly chokes on his sip of water. Hitoshi looks pleased, attention lulling in the direction of the adults and ghost.

“He invited me! And guess what? Good luck catching me!” Oboro grins sharply, “I can just do this—”

The ghost lets go of Izuku’s hand, and the teen knows he’s disappeared from sight.

Izuku cocks an amused eyebrow at the snickering ghost as Hizashi, Hitoshi and Shota all jolt up at the suddenly gone ghost. Izuku just knows the ghost is one hundred percent enjoying his newfound freedom of being able to be visible with just a touch.

Oboro slips his hand back into Izuku’s wordlessly, too comfortable with the touch, smile widening as they all jump again at his abrupt return, “at this rate I could be a master criminal. I would *never* get caught.”

Izuku hums back, “does that make me an accomplice? Aiding and abetting a master criminal?”

“You really are a bad influence,” Shota snorts out, looking fondly at his school friend. “Was the Hero thing just a ruse for your true intentions of being a criminal?”

“Rude!” Oboro scoffs back, looking far too giddy. “I’m a Hero at heart! Anyways, you see all your children off, Dadzawa?”

“*Dadzawa?*” Hitoshi sputters into his coffee as he chokes on a laugh. He coughs once, wiping the splatters off on his sleeve as he jerks his attention up to Shota. “They call you Dadzawa? I haven’t heard that! Oh my God, that’s hilarious! I can’t wait to tell mom! It suits you, Uncle Sho. Wow.”

“You’re such a brat,” Shota scoffs, whirling around to glare at Oboro, “and you’re the worst.”

“I’m the best,” Oboro counters. “It’s not like I made it up, buddy, your kids did it all themselves, and I just liked it! I tried to get Izuku to call you it, but he wouldn’t. Stuck with boring old *dad*. You’re no fun, Izu.”

“Do you want me to stop holding you hand?”

“You’re *so much* fun, Izu!”

Izuku snorts a laugh. “Is everyone going home for the holidays, dad?”

Shota nods slowly, taking Izuku’s change in conversation topic in stride. A little smile settles on his lips as he answers, “yeah. Uraraka just left for her train, and she was the straggler. Now we just need to load up the cats and dump Hitoshi at home and then we can head home too.”

“Gee,” Hitoshi pouts theatrically, “at least *pretend* you like me, Uncle Shota.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Shota sighs. “I suppose I could *pretend*.”

Hitoshi squawks in offense, glaring daggers at his snickering uncle.

“You all suck,” Hitoshi decides in a pout, “except Izuku, even though he’s mean sometimes too. You two are mean uncles, mean adults, and you, ghost uncle or whatever you are to me now, you’re also cruel. A bully. Mean, mean ghost man.”

Oboro quirks an eyebrow, leaning towards Hitoshi teasingly, “you’re still mad I beat ya at the game, huh?”

“You cheated!” Hitoshi crosses his arms over his chest, slumping back in his chair. “Who menus then shoots someone coming right out of it?

How did you even aim in that period of time?! I could barely process the screen switching, and then I was dead!"

"That sounds awfully familiar," Hizashi snickers. "Still up to your tricks then?"

Oboro just grins, not confirming, nor denying.

Hitoshi sighs heavily, pushing himself back up and settling against the backrest of his chair, "who would've thought ghost boy was just as weird as the two of you."

"Of course he's just as weird as us," Hizashi snickers back fondly, "he's our best friend after all!"

"Present tense!" Oboro lets out a breathy laugh, rubbing the back of his neck with the hand not clutching at Izuku's when everyone glances towards him at the outburst.

Shota and Hizashi look spooked for just a second.

"Sorry," Oboro clears his throat, as if clearing away any emotion, rubbing at his eyes, "it's just... usually, um, *was*, y'know? When you've talked about me? Oboro was our best friend. I missed 'is', I guess. And I get it! Don't get me wrong, was was... was was right, but it's nice to get an is."

Izuku squeezes comfortingly at Oboro's hand.

There's a sad look on both Shota and Hizashi's faces as they share a look.

"Oboro..." Shota starts sadly.

"Nah," the ghost laughs awkwardly, "don't worry about it. I'm just... sorry. For, uh, I didn't mean to get excited. Didn't mean to... just forget it, okay? Nothing we can do to change what's been done and... I've had this guy around, so it's been okay."

As if to add emphasis to his words, Oboro holds up their still interlocked hands.

"Seriously," Oboro adds when Izuku's guardians don't lighten up, "I don't blame either of you, alright? I know Mr. Logic and Reason Shota wouldn't believe in ghosts, and I didn't have enough energy to really make myself known so I totally get it. I gave up. No hard feelings.

Don't look so sad, be happy! I'm happy!"

Hizashi draws in a breath that sounds a lot like he's trying to swallow down his own emotions, and Shota turns away from the group, staring hard at the coffee pot he beelines to.

Oboro wilts, "I'm sorry."

"You guys are making him feel bad," Hitoshi scolds.

"We're sorry," Hizashi lets out a shaky breath, offering a little smile. "We're still trying to... y'know, wrap our heads around this. It's not easy. It's so easy to just... banter, you know? Familiar. But it's... it's so different. And to know... you've just been around and we never..."

"We're sorry," Shota agrees calmly.

"I didn't miss as much as you guys think," Oboro offers softly, a little fond smile on his lips. "I've liked watching you guys grow up, you know? Finally getting together after a painfully long and oblivious *courting session*, or whatever it was the two of you were doing before getting your shit together and making it official. Seeing you get married. Watching you guys be happy and be damn good Heroes and teachers— which, Sho, I totally told you so! I have been dying to say that! You're a great teacher, Buddy! And... and seeing you two become parents. I may not have been any part if it but... but I sorta was, you know?"

"You really have always been around," Hizashi laughs, though he's crying. The bright sound doesn't match the tears he's wiping away as he eases towards Oboro and cups his cheeks in his hands. "I really missed you."

Oboro just smiles, "I know."

Hizashi pulls away to wipe his cheeks again, offering another light laugh at Oboro's words.

"As glad as I am that you've always been around with us," Shota bites at his bottom lip, eyes flicking to Hizashi, "it's still a bit weird."

"Oh definitely," Oboro bobs his head in a knowing nod, "but beggars can't be choosers. Don't worry though! I never stuck around when you were *intimate*, if you catch my drift! I'm a man who respects boundaries. Like, nine times outta ten."

“Oboro!” Hizashi squeaks out. “You can’t just—”

“*I* caught your drift,” Hitoshi whispers out as if scarred for life, forehead thumping against the table, “that’s so gross, man. Is he always like this?”

Izuku bites his lip fondly, one shoulder arching in a shrug, “mostly, yeah.”

“I literally do not want to know how much Izuku actually knows about us,” Shota grimaces, shooting the ghost an unimpressed look. “Have you been sabotaging us from the start? I fear to know some of the things you’ve told our kid about us.”

“More like helping!” Oboro scoffs back with a bright smile. “Honestly, you owe a lot of this to my presence, fellas. Our scarred little green bean wouldn’t have even considered any of this without me!”

Shota pauses, gaze flicking to Izuku thoughtfully. He stares for a second, and Izuku can almost see the gears turning in his guardian’s head. “Back... at the start of the year. When you told me you were a late bloomer... You said a friend convinced you to trust me.”

“I’m the friend!” Oboro puffs his chest out proudly. “I told you, I’m the mastermind behind it all.”

“You... um,” Izuku swallows nervously, “you still sorta scared me back then. And... and I didn’t know how he knew you at the time, but he was very insistent. And I knew Eraserhead was a good Hero too but... I might not have told you if Oboro hadn’t pressured me. And I’m— I’m so glad he did! But, uh, yeah... he’s the one who guided me, I guess.”

“So we have you to thank then,” Hizashi smiles softly at the ghost. “Thank you, Oboro. You must've seen some bigger picture, huh? How’d you know we needed him?”

“Nah,” the ghost laughs kindly, “no bigger picture. I just saw a kid who needed good people in his life, and you’re two of the best I know. It was easy after that. I know Sho’s all bark and no bite when it comes to his kids, and you’re too kindhearted for your own good. I knew you three would click.”

“You’re too modest,” Izuku shakes his head fondly, “I wouldn’t be where I am today without him. Not with my Quirk, or... or with you guys. I don’t know where I’d be, honestly. He’s my best friend.”

“That’s something we can agree on,” Shota’s lips twitch up faintly in a smile as he moves closer, setting a hand on both Izuku and Oboro’s head, ruffling their hair simultaneously. “If that’s the case, I’m glad he’s been as good a friend to you as he’s always been to us.”

“You’re gonna make me cry!” Oboro cries out.

“I feel left out again,” Hitoshi sighs teasingly.

“Awh, ‘toshi!” Hizashi coos, leaving Oboro’s side to catch Hitoshi in a chokehold. “Of course, we’d never forget our favorite grumpy nephew! Is this included enough for you, Lil’ troublemaker?”

“On second thought,” the teen chokes out, slipping his hands between Hizashi’s arm and his neck, pushing without really trying to move the arm, “I liked it better when you forgot me.”

They get the cats all loaded up into their carriers and then they load up the car to head home for the winter break. He’s not sure what the break will entail at this point, but he hopes it goes well.

They drop Hitoshi off at home, and then Izuku is left alone with his guardians.

Oboro had decided to wait for them at the apartment, since the car would be overcrowded between the people who can’t just appear places, the bags of luggage they’re all bringing home for the break, and the three cat carriers.

Izuku is really tired and he’s not entirely sure why. He’d slept well into the morning— even managing to sleep through the bustle of his classmates getting ready to go home for a couple weeks and everyone leaving campus. He ends up falling asleep in the car.

He’s woken by Shota’s quiet voice prompting him to wake up from the front seat of the car and then they’re bringing everything upstairs. Izuku tugs on his backpack and grabs Fish’s carrier, while each guardian grabs their own bag and a cat carrier as well.

Oboro is perched on the couch, grinning widely when they finally enter the room. He perks up, jumping to his feet as he heads towards Izuku, “took you guys long enough!"

“Not all of us have the ability to teleport,” Izuku retorts thoughtlessly as he crouches to let Fish out of the carrier. The cat saunters out,

brushing against Izuku's shins before trekking further into the apartment.

Oboro snickers as Shota and Hizashi exchange a look from behind the teenager.

Izuku stands to his full height, offering the ghost his hand.

Oboro readily takes it, beaming widely at his school friends.

They talk more, and Izuku tries to keep up with the conversation.

He's more than happy to sit at Oboro's side and be a part of this without actually being a part of it.

As the day progresses, the near constant touching between the teenager and ghost has Izuku's temperature dropping, even if he doesn't really notice. He barely acknowledges the numbness settling in the hand clutched in Oboro's or the shivers he's subconsciously ignoring.

It's Hizashi who smiles softly, ruffling Izuku's curls as he speaks, "I think it's time for you to stop lending your energy for a bit, Sweetheart."

"What?" Izuku blinks owlishly, suppressing a deep shiver, as the ghost turns to look at him with his head tilted in interest, eyes scanning Izuku. Oboro's cheeks puff out faintly, but he nods in agreement.

"Your lips are starting to turn blue," Shota informs quietly, lips quirked downwards in a light worried frown. "And you look exhausted. How much energy is this really draining from you? As much as we like having Oboro back, you shouldn't do it continuously if there's a chance it's hurting you."

"Oh yeah," Oboro hums, being the one to sever their contact.

Izuku knows the ghost disappears from sight, but he's still plopped down beside Izuku on the couch even if no one else can see him.

Oboro offers a light sheepish, yet faintly forlorn smile, "let's give it a rest for a bit and then we can try again later if you're feeling up to it. We've both seen what happens when we abuse this Quirk thing. And we have no idea what all this touching will do. You do look exhausted."

“I only almost died of hypothermia once,” Izuku scoffs in offense. “I’m fine.”

“Once is more than enough, sunshine,” Hizashi snorts out, though his eyes are a bit wary. “It’s okay to take a breather. Don’t just focus on us, as much as Sho and I, and I bet Oboro too, appreciate you giving so much of yourself for us. You’ve probably been cold for most of the day, even if you didn’t notice. We all know we shouldn’t mess around with your internal temperature, yeah?”

Izuku slumps, a chill climbing up his spine as if the words remind him that he is in fact cold. His body racks in a shiver, and his arms wrap around himself faintly as he melts into his sweatshirt.

“Why don’t you go rest for a bit?” Hizashi suggests easily, so soft and kind. He’s doing that thing again where he knows what Izuku needs before Izuku knows. “Pull out your heated blanket and cuddle into your warm blankets, okay? You rest up while we make some dinner, yeah? I’m sure we’d all like to avoid another hospital visit for hypothermia. We’ll see how you’re feeling after you’ve warmed up some.”

“Listen to your dads,” Oboro teases.

“I hate you,” Izuku snaps out under his breath, tone holding no heat as he pushes himself up, seeing the ghost doing the same out of the corner of his eye. “Oboro’s coming with me, I think. Just so you know in case... um, y’know, you’re talking to him when he’s not around.”

“Noted,” Shota snorts out fondly, “go lie down, kiddo.”

“It’s less effort to communicate with you anyways,” the ghost agrees cheekily. “So, I’ll hang with you.”

“I’m so honored,” Izuku shoots the ghost a half-amused look, bowing his head at his guardians as he does as directed and disappears into his room.

The bed is cold when he flops down after digging out the heated blanket he keeps under the bed, but it warms up fast, both with body heat and the warmth of the blanket. He melts into the warmth, watching the ghost as he settles on the desktop.

“Are you really okay?” Oboro asks softly. “We’ve never had so much contact and I’ve... really never seen your skin turn any different colour. I mean, it’s just barely there, but it is... it’s a bit blue. Are we

overdoing it? I don't want to hurt you."

"I'm fine," Izuku mumbles into the blankets, smooshing his face into his pillow as he lets his eyes sliver shut. "I like that you're able to see your friends again."

"But I don't want to hurt you doing it," Oboro counters gently. "As much as I like being able to... to see them and touch them and have them see me too— to know I'm there with them— we shouldn't keep doing it if you're taking the damage."

Izuku blinks his eyes open, staring at the ghost from his blanket cocoon.

Izuku squints before sighing softly.

"Okay, so it might be taking a bit more energy than it usually does," Izuku relents to the ghost, throwing a hand back into the mess of blankets to locate the cat plushie. "I like doing it, honestly, but... I didn't even realize I was getting colder because it doesn't usually happen when you're solid and... and I don't know, I think it may be taking my energy as well. I'm tired, and it doesn't make sense after I slept in so late. I've slept a lot, actually."

Oboro frowns thoughtfully.

"You really are too self-sacrificing," the ghost finally breathes out. He's quiet for a long second. "I'm sorry by the way. I know I apologized yesterday too, but I think I should say it again when you're not... y'know, being forced to confess your secrets."

"Sorry for what?" Izuku asks calmly, eyes slipping shut again.

"For what I said," Oboro admits softly. "I was out of line yesterday. I didn't have any right to demand that you tell them your secret when I *knew* how scared you were. I knew that you had trauma related to your Quirk, that you had valid reasons for keeping it a secret, but I still... I don't think you're selfish for wanting to protect yourself. I don't even know why I said that."

Izuku processes the words for a long second before blinking his eyes open again and pushing himself up so he's resting against the headboard instead of laying down.

Oboro isn't looking at him, eyes locked on his fingers where they're settled in his lap.

“I’m sorry too,” Izuku breathes out finally, picking at a thread on the cat stuffy. “It just all happened at once, you know? First Shota and Hizashi were gone, and then you disappeared and when you were back you were... I’ve never seen you so frantic or... or hysterical. So hurt.”

Izuku sucks in a breath, “I hated seeing you like that, but I didn’t... I couldn’t really help, you know? Just hearing that you’ve been... that your body was out there, and you were back in it for a moment— a ghost reunited with his body, which sounds *impossible*— that was a lot to process too. And then you’d... you wanted me to risk it all to help you when I... I really love them, Oboro. And I— I love you too, of course, but you’re still... and-and they’re—”

“I get it,” the ghost whispers. “Now that I’m thinking clearly again, I get it, Izuku. It was a tough choice and at the end of the day... I am a ghost. I’ve come to terms with that even if for a second I thought that maybe... b-but I won’t force you. I went about it all wrong and I risked far more then I even considered putting you in that position.”

The silence rings for a long second, before Oboro continues, “I don’t know what I would’ve done if I pushed you away and you... you decided you didn’t *want* to be my friend anymore. You’ve given me something I haven’t had in more than a decade; you could take it back too and I can’t stop that. You could just... stop talking to me. I never want to lose you and after I watched you leave... I don’t know, I just... I thought maybe you were done with me. That I’d finally pushed too hard.”

“I wouldn’t ever do that,” Izuku assures gently. “You did push too hard, but that’s not enough to force me away. Friends are too hard to come by for someone like me, so I cherish what I have. Whether you’re human or ghost, you know? You just... didn’t give me a second to think. I was already scared, and you were scared and we... butted heads. You... you hurt me. You know me better than anyone and you... you called me *selfish*. I know you weren't thinking clearly either, but you put me in a corner, Oboro.”

“If anything, you’re *selfless*,” Oboro offers a light smile.

The ghost wilts, curling further into himself, “I was just hurting, I think, and when you didn’t see it my way— when you didn’t jump on the offer of helping no matter what I was asking you to give up... I think I wanted you to hurt too. It’s awful, I hated myself the second it left my mouth but—”

“It wasn’t you talking,” Izuku knows, “it was the emotion. The fear. I… I was hurt, I still am, a bit, but I know that’s not something you’d say. It’s easier to know how to hurt the people you’re close to after all, right? We all say things we don’t mean when we’re hurting.”

“I still shouldn’t have said it,” Oboro shakes his head, “I really am sorry.”

“I’m sorry too,” Izuku repeats. “You weren’t being selfish either. There’s nothing wrong with asking for help when you know I… that I *may* be able to help. And… and if I can help you, I want to.”

Oboro blinks, stares for a long second before a light smile twitches onto his lips, “you really want to help me try to get my body back?”

“There’s nothing stopping me now,” Izuku shrugs, offering his own light smile at the ghost’s growing excitement. “The secret’s out. At least to my guardians. We have to run it past Sho and ‘zashi and probably Detective Tsukauchi because we can’t just go to Tartarus without a reason but… after seeing you with them again, I want you to have a chance to come back and live again. It *would* be selfish to keep you all to myself when you deserve to have a chance.”

“I don’t know where I’d be without you either, Izuku.”

“Probably sad and lonely on the kitchen counter while Shota and Hizashi enjoy being home again,” Izuku snickers as he slumps down against the mattress, eyes drifting shut again.

“That—” Oboro laughs heartily, “that’s actually probably true. But it’s also so rude!”

Izuku hums back.

“Have a good rest, buddy,” Oboro says when Izuku doesn’t respond. Izuku can hear the smile in the ghost’s voice, and then he hears what sounds like a book being opened.

Everything feels right.

Oboro wakes him for dinner a few hours later, and Izuku honestly doesn’t feel much more rested then when he fell asleep, but he knows his temperature had gone up and when he stops in the bathroom before heading to the kitchen, he’s pleased to not spot any weird tints to his skin.

They settle at the table as a group, a plate once again marking Oboro's spot with them. The ghost still looks far too giddy, but Izuku's glad something so small can give the ghost such happiness.

When Izuku settles, both Hizashi and Shota shoot him questioning looks, to which he nods in confirmation that the ghost had joined them, even if they can't see him.

Izuku clutches his chopsticks in his hand as he stares down at the stir-fry. Shota and Hizashi are both eating, and Oboro is silently watching as he thumbs at the plate in front of him.

Izuku's heart feels heavy as his grip on his chopsticks tightens.

"I... need to talk to you guys about something," Izuku starts slowly, instantly gaining everyone's attention. He almost wants to shrink under the attention, but then again, these are his guardians and his best friend.

"Okay," Hizashi bows his head, setting his chopsticks down on the rim of his bowl, giving Izuku his entire attention. Similarly, Shota's hands settle onto the table, but he keeps a hold of his chopsticks. "What's up, Sunshine?"

"It's... It's about Oboro," Izuku admits, glancing over the ghost. The blue-haired teen looks slightly spooked, before understanding settles on his expression. "A-about his, um, his body. At Tartarus."

Hizashi sucks in a startled breath, but Shota just blinks slowly. It's only then that Izuku realizes he'd only mentioned what he'd known to Shota at the beach, and not to Hizashi at all. Whoops.

"Okay," Shota is the first to speak, slow and inviting, "maybe you should tell us what you know about all of that first, huh? It's confidential. If we weren't his closest friends, then... we probably wouldn't have been told about it."

Oboro stands, rounding the table to lean against Izuku's shoulder, arms crossing over the entirety of Izuku's shoulders as he becomes visible to the two men. Izuku gives them props for the fact that neither really startles besides their eyes widening a fraction at the suddenness of someone suddenly standing over Izuku.

Izuku angles his head up to glance at the ghost, seeing Oboro offering his friends a serious look, "you should just assume he knows as much as you know, but more."

“Ah,” Hizashi hesitates, eyeing the ghost before his gaze drops a bit to Izuku’s face, “right. Of course. Almost forgot for a second there. Okay. What are we talking about? Sho and I’ll need a bit more. I don’t think we’re on your guy’s wavelength quite yet.”

“I actually,” Izuku clears his throat uncertainly, “I, um, I want to get a bit of a better understanding, I guess? And... and please let me know if you don’t want to talk about it but... but what really happened in there? From, ah, from your point of view?”

Oboro looks intrigued by this, leaning a little closer into Izuku as his gaze flicks from Shota to Hizashi and then back. The two men suck in similar breaths at the reminder of what had happened in the room, sharing a quick look.

Izuku thinks they’re about to deny him, but to his surprise, Hizashi speaks quietly.

“We were supposed to talk to him,” Hizashi whispers. “There was no brain activity, no heartbeat, but he was up, conscious. He... t-the Nomu, I guess, was functioning without the necessary means to function. Tsukauchi and Gran Torino had hoped that seeing us may... I don’t even know, may spark recognition or something? Bring Oboro back.”

“And it did,” Shota continues, voice carefully emotionless. “For just a moment, he had a heartbeat. A spike. But it... it could’ve been anything. A fluke even. Neither of us were thinking very clearly. It was a futile effort. It didn’t make a difference. He’s still— they're still using you, Oboro. Even if he’s locked away in Tartarus. We couldn’t get through.”

“What if...” Izuku winces, “what if it wasn’t as futile as you think?”

“What—”

“When that...” Oboro cuts Hizashi off, swallowing roughly as he tears his gaze away, “when you saw that EKG spike... I was back in my body. Just for a second. I felt— I felt my heart, and I could breathe. I saw you guys. I was... it felt like I was alive again. But I... I wasn’t in control. I had no control. I wasn’t... I wasn’t *strong* enough to fight it.”

It's pin-drop silent as they sit around the table.

Shota and Hizashi look gutted, and Izuku thinks Oboro is trembling behind him. He tries to push down his own unease but thinks it might

be showing on his face anyways.

“What does that...” Shota hesitates now, glancing between Oboro and Izuku, “what does that mean?”

“You already know he can use my energy,” Izuku explains gently. “He’s doing it right now. We... figured that out early in our friendship. I didn’t know it made him visible, but he’s been able to do more and more the more time we spend together and the closer we are proximity wise. His limitations without me are typically interacting with direct energy sources— lights, mainly. When we’re not in contact, but close, he can pick objects up and interact with things in a way he couldn’t before we met.”

Izuku glances back at the ghost, gesturing to him with a shrug, “and when we are in contact... well, he’s visible? We believe that’s only possible because of me. You’ve both said you saw him in contact with me, before we even realized such a thing had happened. His connection to the living world strengthens around me. He can touch you guys. He becomes solid. His energy feeds off mine.”

“Like... how you used Cloud at the USJ and Sports Festival?” Hizashi’s brow is furrowed.

“Yeah,” Izuku nods. “But... that could also be One for All. Like how I’m manifesting the vestiges’ Quirks. Those don’t really belong to me, but I can use them. It’s the same with Cloud, I think? Or maybe... I don’t know? It could also be the ghost seeing thing? I’m not sure. I never got close enough to a ghost before him to realize.”

“I have that effect on people,” Oboro offers in a vain attempt at lightening the atmosphere.

Shota’s lips quirk up faintly, and Hizashi offers a breathy laugh.

It feels a bit like pity.

The ghost sobers, bowing his head thoughtfully, “I tried to use my Quirk before Izuku. But... it never... worked. I wasn’t even trying that first time it happened when I touched him. It just happened. And it was... powerful. I had limitations before, when I was alive, but it didn’t feel like there was any limitations then.”

“That’s One for All,” Izuku informs his confused looking guardians. “It’s an energy stockpiling Quirk at its base, and the vestiges have told me their Quirks got stronger when they inherited the Quirk. I may not

possess Cloud, but Oboro uses my energy, *One for All*'s energy, and I think it may have accepted him as an extension of me? Um. Maybe, at least. This is all in theory, mind you."

"Okay," Shota nods slowly. "So he can use your energy. That's what makes your temperature drop, I suppose. Just... what does this have to do with Oboro's body?"

"I think..." Oboro swallows nervously, hesitant gaze locking on his school friends, "I think if I had Izuku with me, I might have the strength to take my body back from whatever All for One did to it."

Hizashi sucks in a sharp breath, and Shota's eyes are wide and unblinking, probably aching.

"Do you really—" Hizashi's voice sounds wrecked. "Do you think that's... that's really possible? You could... you could come back?"

Shota seems to shake himself from his stupor, the momentary excitement melting away to concern now, "what would that entail for Izuku? How would it affect him? Just making you visible now is draining his energy. I'm so glad I get to see you, Oboro, honestly. I've missed you so damn much, and this is— this is a miracle, but this *is* hurting him. What would doing *that* do to him?"

"We don't know," Izuku admits, staring down at his hands. "We don't even know if it's *possible*. I always got a weird vibe from Kurogiri. There was something off about him. Almost mechanical, but not necessarily bad when he's not following orders. I don't know if the Nomu programming is as secure as All for One thinks. I really think there's a chance he could retake his body after hearing everything."

"But could it hurt you?" Hizashi asks worriedly, reaching across the table to set his hand over Izuku's interlocked ones. "I'd love to have Oboro back, believe me, but I'd never forgive myself if something happened to you doing it. It sounds like you want to play with something no one has any right to play around with."

"We're not going to sacrifice you on the chance Oboro might..." Shota swallows roughly, looking away. "Oboro died. I'm sorry, but that's the truth of it. I saw. Hizashi saw. No one could survive that. You're alive, Izuku. And we hope you have a long life ahead of you. If you're not sure you'll be okay afterwards, it's like we're... like we're trading you for him. We love— we love *both* of you, but that's not a risk we'd want to take."

“I can’t guarantee anything,” Izuku shakes his head, “but I want to try. If I can, if there’s a chance he could come back, that he could *live*, and I don’t even try… what kind of Hero would I be?”

“One who considers themself too,” Hizashi says quietly, looking so upset.

Izuku looks away, “I want to help Oboro. It’s… my decision, isn’t it? It’s my energy. My body. My Quirk. I… love you guys too, but I want to do this. I want to give him a *chance*. Are you really going to stop me?”

“We want to try,” Shota whispers in defeat, “but I know how resistant your will is. I know that even if we did, you’d find your own way to do it, no matter the cost. We don’t agree with this, putting yourself on the line for something that may not even… but I know better than to believe we can stand in your way.”

“I wish you’d think about you,” Hizashi sniffles, wiping at his face with his hands, “if you want to do this, we’re going to do it as safely as we can, okay? After we talk with Tsukauchi and see if it’s even possible to try. That means having doctors on standby, and having ways to warm you up fast, but safely. You need to understand we will put a stop to it if it looks like you’re getting hurt. You’re still a kid— *our* kid— and we’re going to protect you from harm however we can.”

“Okay,” Izuku agrees with a nod. “I… don’t want to get hurt, but I can’t not help my friend.”

Shota hums uneasily, “I don’t know if thinking like that’ll make you a good Hero, or a stupid one.”

“It’ll make him a *real* one,” Oboro offers kindly. “Just like you two.”

Talking to Detective Tsukauchi goes a lot better than Izuku had assumed it was going to do.

He’s sandwiched between his guardians when the detective comes to their apartment at Shota’s request. It’s not technically official police business, and all things considered, this is the safest place to talk. And it’s the place Izuku feels safest telling someone else too. At home with his guardians.

He’s surprised, rightfully so when Oboro appears on the floor, leaning back against Izuku’s knees when Tsukauchi looks at the three on the

couch as if they're crazy when they tell him about the ghost Quirk.

"After One for All," the detective breathes out awkwardly, eyes still wide with surprise, "I really shouldn't be surprised by something like this."

Izuku knows All Might had told the detective after Shota had found out after the Blackwhip manifestation incident. Izuku hadn't seen the detective, but he knew Yagi-san had done as he said he was going to. He's still a bit surprised by Tsukauchi so openly mentioning the confidential Quirk in the presence of the two men, even if they both already know.

The three adults strategize after that.

Now that Tsukauchi believes them.

Izuku listens in intently, adding things when he sees fit, and even Oboro manifests the confidence to add his own two cents as the conversation continues.

It's the following morning that Izuku finds himself being escorted through the terrifyingly hollow halls of Tartarus, sandwiched between Hizashi and Oboro as Tsukauchi and Shota lead them further into the prison. Izuku feels jittery as he's guided along, Hizashi's arm around his shoulders protectively as Oboro hovers close.

When they reach a steel door, the group pauses as Tsukauchi unlocks it with a series of keys and scans. Izuku would be impressed at the security if this wasn't Japan's most secure prison.

It has to be to house people like Kurogiri and All for One.

Izuku is spooked at the thought of being in the same building as Shigaraki's master. It's hard to push down the fear, and he thinks he might also feel One for All warning him in the back of his mind.

The door opens to a small room, and even further in, Izuku spots a glass window.

Behind the window he spots Kurogiri. The villain is dressed in white, arms trapped in a strait jacket as metal clamps hold his legs to the chair legs. There are straps holding his bound arms to his chest, an added layer of security. The man's face hasn't changed— still consumed by the purple Izuku had studied during his time with the League.

Yellow eyes stare unseeingly, but Izuku can't help but feel like the creature is watching him intently.

Izuku draws in an unsteady breath.

Hizashi squeezes at his shoulder calmingly. "Okay, Sunshine?"

Izuku manages a nod.

Oboro's body is strapped to some wires, and Izuku sees the steady, unbeating line of the heart monitor currently being looked over by a woman he doesn't know. Tsukauchi joins the woman at the monitors, frowning to himself before sitting in the chair in front of the monitors.

There are three other people in the room, none of which he knows.

Oboro had already stepped into the sealed room, right through the wall, but Izuku can't join him yet. Not until someone opens the door. The ghost stares at his own body in devastation, his expression twisted with a foreign sort of hopefulness. Izuku forces himself to look away.

There's a general unease clouding the room. Izuku senses fear and uncertainty in Shota and Hizashi. Tsukauchi is oddly serious, but then again, he knows what could happen too. He'd been hesitant to agree to this, but having Kurogiri the created Nomu gone for good, getting a civilian being *used* against their will back, had been the detective's tipping point.

Especially with Izuku so intent they make this happen.

"Let's go over this one more time," Tsukauchi finally says from his spot. "Midoriya is going to go into the cell with the Nomu. He's going to use his Quirk. With any luck, he'll be able to help force the Nomu programming out. We have a team of medical personnel on hand, and we all know the signs we're looking for. Our first priority is keeping Midoriya alive. Watch your monitors. React accordingly. Remember that."

The detective pauses, intense gaze finding Izuku in the crowd of people, "this is a matter of national security and whatever witness in this room will not be breathed of outside this room. Everyone has signed nondisclosure agreements, and you are legally bound to keep your word. Whatever you think you witnessed, just remember, *no, you did not.*"

There are some nods, and quiet words of agreement.

A kind woman helps Izuku into his own heart monitor, as well as a temperature reading patch that sends his temp to the computer one of the medical personnel is watching over that gets stuck to his forehead.

He feels like an idiot with all this stuff on him, but Shota and Hizashi had requested it all, so he doesn't complain. He might even feel a bit safer knowing he's being monitored in case something does go wrong.

Shota is perched by the door, waiting.

Izuku offers a light smile as he inches closer.

"Are you sure about this, Kid?" The man looks like he wants to call the whole thing off. He looks like he wants Izuku to call the whole thing off, but Izuku won't. Not until he tries.

"I'm sure," Izuku hopes he keeps the nervous tremor from his tone.

Shota swallows, forcing a nod.

He sweeps Izuku into a tight hug, like the one Hizashi had given him before the medic had pulled him aside to get him hooked up to all the machines. The blonde is watching from his position in front of the window, lip caught between his teeth worriedly.

"Be careful," Shota whispers as he finally pulls away. "We love you, okay?"

"Love you too," Izuku bows his head in a nod.

He tried to offer a light smile to both Shota and Hizashi, but it doesn't seem to help calm his guardian at all. Shota blows out another slow breath as he turns to unlock the door separating Izuku from Oboro and Kurogiri.

He steps into the room and the door shuts behind him but doesn't lock again.

"Midoriya Izuku," Kurogiri says when yellow flickering eyes fall onto him.

He'd been watching the disturbance in his room wordlessly, watching as if he hadn't really been watching at all. Or, maybe as if he hadn't been retaining anything going on around him.

It would make sense if he was a Nomu made specifically for Shigaraki.

Now though, it seems the Nomu has identified him as familiar.

“A pleasure once again,” Kurogiri offers, tone well-mannered. “How is Shigaraki Tomura?”

Izuku doesn’t answer.

The Nomu doesn’t seem to mind.

“Whenever you’re ready, Midoriya,” Tsukauchi calls from the other room.

Izuku sucks in another slow breath as the reality of all this crashes over him. He’s scared.

“Are you sure you want to do this still?” Oboro asks worriedly, tearing his gaze away from his body to focus on Izuku completely. “I’m on board, completely, just... seeing you here now. W-with, um, with me, or-or *him*, I guess. I’m scared, Izuku. What if... what if it’s not worth it?”

“It’s worth it if it gives you a chance,” Izuku holds his hand out, offering the ghost a tiny, yet honest smile despite the obvious fear. “I’ll save you. That’s what a Hero does.”

“You’re already my Hero,” Oboro promises, taking Izuku’s hand into his own.

Shota watches sharply as the teenager enters the room.

He can’t see Oboro, but he knows the ghost is in there too. He sees Izuku’s mouth moving, talking just under his breath, so he knows Oboro is there too.

Shota feels Hizashi settle at his side, both hanging by the door into the cell in case anything goes wrong, and they need to respond instantly, but both still with a view of everything going on in the cell via the window.

Kurogiri seems unbothered, but what would the Nomu have to be bothered about. It’s not like it would know what’s happening without an explanation no one is going to give. It just... speaks to Izuku as if they’re companions, asking about Shigaraki like he had with Shota and Hizashi. Like it’s programmed to do.

It sounds nothing like Oboro.

“I’m scared, Shota,” HIzashi whispers under his breath, drawing Shota’s attention away from his thoughts and onto his husband. The blonde’s eyes are locked on their child behind the glass. “What if...”

Nothing has happened yet, but it’s only a matter of time.

“He knows what he’s doing,” Shota says, even if they both know it’s a poor attempt at comfort.

Izuku doesn’t know what he’s doing. They all know that. Not even Izuku knows what's going to happen in that room. When he offers a part of himself to Oboro and... and hopes for the best. Hopes for anything *but* the worst.

He’s putting himself on the line once again, and this time they can’t possibly know what’ll come of it.

Shota knows they can’t stop him.

As much as they want to.

Shota knows this is something Izuku feels like he needs to do, and nothing they say or do will change that. He’s a kid, sure, but he’s the strongest kid Shota had ever met.

And with... that Quirk of his.

Well, Shota doesn’t know what’s about to happen.

Still, it feels like they’re sending their kid into the lion’s den. Knowing what the Nomu had done to the child— at the USJ and during the bootcamp where it had taken both Izuku and Bakugou. It may not have intentions, orders, to hurt Izuku now, but it’s still capable of it.

“What if he...” Hizashi’s words waver off, bottom lip wobbling.

“Don’t,” Shota lets his shoulder press against Hizashi, offering what little comfort he can with all these strangers around. The blonde leans into it. “They’ll be okay, alright? Think positive. Izuku... he’ll need all the positive he can get.”

Hizashi wipes at his eyes, head bowing in a sharp nod.

It’s a gasp that draws Shota’s gaze from his husband, eyes instantly jerking to the window where Oboro is now visible. They’re facing the Nomu, hands interlocked. Shota wants to look around to gauge what everyone’s thinking but can’t force himself to look away from his child

and best friend in that room.

For a long second, nothing happens.

Oboro and Izuku just stand facing Kurogiri, and it looks like the Nomu's attention has finally found the ghost. It's body's consciousness.

Shota feels like he's going to be sick.

Shota watches on bated breath as the teenager finally moves closer to the Nomu. His hand lifts hesitantly, Izuku chancing a glance back at the ghost clutching his other hand and then Izuku's hand presses through the purple of Kurogiri's Quirk protecting his face and everything goes quiet to Shota's ears.

Izuku's body lights up with sparks of green— One for All, Shota knows now.

He'd seen that Quirk lighting up Izuku's body so many times. It's more familiar than it is foreign. Something far too powerful to be in the hands of a high schooler, yet there's no one Shota thinks is better suited to handle it.

But why...

Shota doesn't even take his eyes off of Izuku but suddenly.

It changes.

He can't even process the change, that's how fast it happened. He'd been staring, and his brain doesn't seem to be able to spot the difference in the cell until he spots what's changed.

Oboro is— the ghost is *gone*.

Everything comes back to Shota at once.

The medical equipment is beeping warningly, and people are moving around him hastily, moving towards the door urgently.

Hizashi is clutching at Shota's arm, but he feels rooted in place. It's like there's static in his ears, but he can also hear everything so clearly.

The Quirk hiding Oboro's face from view slowly recedes until just Oboro's face and hair is visible. He looks exactly as he had the day he'd died. Face youthful, unaging all these years. His eyes are closed,

and his head is lulling forwards as if whatever had been holding it up is gone.

One for All flickers away from Izuku and the beeping gets louder, more urgent and persistent. And it’s not just one. All the alarms are blaring. Shota can barely process what he’s hearing. And then—

And then Izuku collapses to the ground.

Then all at once the room falls to glaringly loud *flatlines*.

Chapter End Notes

Well? Whaddya guys think?

I had a lot of fun with this chapter! I liked writing Oboro as a menace who appears when he feels like it! He was definitely the child who hid places to scare the shit out of you, and you can't change my mind! It was super fun writing Erasermic with their two (three if you count the ghost) problem children. Now, there's like a 98% chance that this will finish at 50 chapters like I mentioned before. I'm hopeful to get it finshed by the end of the month, but y'know, I'm untrustworthy.

Anyways! As always, I hope you guys enjoyed the update! Comments are greatly appreciated! I love seeing what you guys have to say, and seeing your theories, opinions and emotions after chapters like this :) Also thank you so much for all the interaction across the board, between comment, kudos, bookmarks, subs and even fanart! You guys are amazing!

Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

Hello!

It's my birthday as I publish this (the 26th, depending on when you see this) :D so I thought there was no better fitting time to post this last chapter! This fic has been so uch fun to write, and I've loved ever second of it. I never would've thought it would've gotten this big, with both word count, as well as readers. I'm so grateful for each and every one of you, whether you've stuck around from the early chapters, or whether you just stumbled upon this yesterday! Thank you!

Also! I've got some more fanart to share with you all! Our first art is a sketch of the hallway scene from chapter 47, and that comes from @brewsbrownies on Tumblr and BruisedBrownies here on ao3. The second comes from @dreamyghostspace on Tumblr and it's a whole bunch of art of our fav boys! Thank you both for putting in the time and effort to make something for this fic! Drop by and give the artists some love for their hard work if you feel so inclined!

Now, without further ado~ I hope you all like the last chapter of Yuuei Survival Guide!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three days.

It’s been three days since Izuku tried to return Oboro’s spirit to his body.

It’s been three days since their child’s heart stopped, since the insistent, ringing beep of the heart monitor announced that Izuku’s heart had stopped in his chest.

It’s been three days since Shota watched the child keel over before his eyes, Shota rooted in place as he and Hizashi clutched desperately at each other in fear, only able to watch from their spot despite their own first aid knowledge and Hero licenses. A feeling of helplessness settling like a brick in his chest.

Three days since Shota had watched as the medical personnel, that

he'd never been more thankful for, had flocked to Izuku and Oboro urgently. Three of the medics falling to their knees around Izuku, hands all over him, while Tsukauchi and the fourth medic rushed to Oboro's body.

Shota lifts his head from his hands now, scanning Izuku's tiny prone form in the hospital bed.

It had been three days since that small team of medics got his heart beating again.

His gaze lifts a bit higher, eyes struggling to focus on the second prone form in the next bed over.

It's been three days since Shirakumo Oboro's heart started steadily beating again, a literal *miracle*, after nearly fourteen years as Shigaraki's impossible little puppet.

It's been three days, and there haven't been any improvements.

Izuku's temperature had dropped far faster than anyone was prepared for, and according to the doctor who'd rushed the child away upon arrival at the hospital, Izuku had manifested so much energy through... they're not even sure— Shota's guess being One for All that he carefully hadn't mentioned— that his heart had essentially been so overwhelmed by the energy consuming the teenager's body that it just... stopped.

Izuku's heart had needed to be *jumpstarted* so it would start beating again.

Chest compressions done by the medics were the only thing that had brought Izuku back.

The doctor had said it was the worst case of Quirk overuse and exhaustion he'd ever seen. Shota can't help but think about how that information tracks for Izuku. He throws himself into everything he does, Shota knows.

Izuku had quite literally tried to give Oboro everything he had.

His heart breaks, but it does make sense.

The medics had quite literally saved the child's life by their fast response times.

If they hadn't of been there... Izuku might not be here anymore. And *here* being a quite loose term, considering the boy is only alive right now because he's being supported by machines. There's a steady beeping of his heart monitor, almost like music to Shota's ears, but this is hardly being alive.

He's comatose and hasn't shown any signs of waking.

Similarly, Oboro looks so small too, despite the fact he'd been obnoxiously tall as a teenager. He hasn't grown at all over the years—which makes sense considering his body was dead and preserved; whatever All for One had done to his corpse had preserved Oboro's youth.

All Shota is really thankful for is the fact that Oboro's internal workings were all still there and able to be restarted. He still had a heart, brain, lungs, organs and internal workings. Shota doesn't know what All for One truly did to his friend all those years ago when he'd gotten his hands on Oboro's body, but it's a breath of relief to know everything that should be there, still is there.

He'd been rushed away upon arrival for scans, x-rays and every other test under the sun.

Oboro's body hadn't been healed all those years ago. They'd been using him all this time, but they hadn't healed anything. Some of his bones were still shattered from the building that had taken his life. He was a medical marvel, as far as doctors and nurses could see.

Anyone even stepping foot into Izuku and Oboro's hospital room were all under strict non-disclosure agreements, but that didn't mean they were privy to what actually happened.

That was entirely confidential, to protect not just Oboro, but Izuku as well.

Oboro had had twelve healing sessions. Mainly a bone repair specialist who comes by every four hours to try to med the breaks and align the fractures. His Quirk takes the structure of metals, medical-grade titanium mostly, and transfers it into bone density.

It's essential just adding titanium plating to bones by infusing the metal into the bone structures directly. It reinforced bone strength as well as mends what's been broken.

And Oboro had needed twelve sessions thus far.

The man is continuously shocked by the fact the someone could've lived with such atrocious breaks.

Four vertebrae in his spine had been completely shattered, and three more cracked. More of his ribs than not were cracked. His skull was fractured, arms snapped in multiple places. He had a broken ankle and both tibias in his shins were cracked, obvious impact fractures.

Seeing those x-rays, you'd be able to tell that this body had been crushed under something heavy.

When Shota shuts his eyes, he can imagine Oboro trying to protect his face, or even getting caught off guard by the building completely, too busy worrying about others than himself.

Shota had seen the aftermath of Oboro after that villain attack—hadn't been able to tear his eyes away from Oboro's unmoving body, still sometimes sees the scene in his nightmares. All these years, they were the kinds of injuries Shota always knew his friend would have had after being crushed by a building... but he'd never be prepared to really see how extensive it was.

It's a surprise Kurogiri was even able to stand with such extensive damage to his vessel, but then again, what would a Nomu care if it couldn't feel pain? The Nomu they'd been studying had no functions—no brain active, no heart rate, no reaction to pain, or stimuli.

Kurogiri was relatively advanced, but he was still a Nomu.

Shota hadn't known how to tell the man that *someone* hadn't lived with it, but *something* had. Shota bites his tongue and forces his attention away. The man is glad Oboro hadn't woken up yet either, he'd be in a world of pain if he had.

It was still up in the air if Oboro would ever walk again, let alone if he'd ever even wake up.

It was likely he'd have some chronic pain just from the severity of the injuries, especially left untreated for so long. Nothing is guaranteed, and they still haven't brought in their secret weapon of Recovery Girl, considering Oboro's stamina is near nonexistent, but there's always a chance for a miracle when healing Quirks are involved.

Tsukauchi had managed to get Izuku and Oboro both into a secluded room in the intensive care unit. Shota doesn't know what the man had pulled, but it was obviously something.

Oboro was cuffed to the bed with Quirk cancelling cuffs any time he wasn't receiving some sort of healing session. He was still technically in custody. Tsukauchi couldn't bypass that protocol.

Shota knows his reasoning is legit.

They couldn't be sure if this had worked until Oboro, or... or Kurogiri, woke up.

It was better safe than sorry, even if seeing Oboro's teenaged face cuffed to the bed like he's a threat or something was a sight Shota is sure he'll never forget. It's up there, almost as high as finding Oboro after he'd died.

Shota's gaze flicks to Hizashi, who is curled up in a small cot they'd requested in the room. Neither of them had left the hospital since they'd each taken an ambulance with either Izuku or Oboro.

Hizashi had only just fallen asleep after nearly twenty-six hours awake.

Shota still couldn't force himself to sleep, but out of the two of them, he's definitely the one used to functioning with little sleep. It's for the best anyways— Shota had assured his husband he'd stay away and wake him up if anything happened, but as expected, nothing has happened yet.

Hizashi looks exhausted. Even asleep he looks exhausted.

Shota wishes he could take the pain away from his husband.

There are very few people who know about what happened. He, Hizashi and Tsukauchi, of course. Nezu knows, but Shota isn't quite sure how. Recovery Girl was clued in, just so she was prepared to come if they needed her. The old woman had readily assured she'd be waiting for a call.

Shota had told Yua the bare minimum— nothing about Izuku's Quirk, just that there had been an accident that Izuku got caught up in, and that it wasn't looking good.

Shota had then had to answer an angry call from Hitoshi, where the teenager had yelled his emotions out before he ended up dissolving in sobs when Shota had gently confided that he wasn't sure if Izuku would really be okay.

“He was fine when I saw him two days ago, uncle Sho!” Hitoshi had wailed out angrily, at which point Yua had taken the phone from her son and apologized softly on Hitoshi’s behalf.

Shota can’t blame the kid. He knows Hitoshi is just as close to Izuku.

Shota kind of wants to cry like that as well.

Oboro’s existence was being kept quiet.

There was no point in saying anything unless they knew it wasn’t just going to hurt everyone all over again. It’s cruel to do that to someone. They’d already mourned him once, the Shirakumo family didn’t need hope after so long accepting Oboro was gone, only for this to backfire and leave them grieving all over again.

Shota and Hizashi had vehemently denied contacting his family until they knew for sure he’d live, that whatever Izuku had risked his own life to accomplish actually worked, despite the fact that he was technically a minor, visibly, at least.

That was Tsukauchi’s fight though, all Shota and Hizashi wanted to focus on was their son and their possibly resurrected best friend.

Shota sighs quietly again, letting his hand settle over Izuku’s once more.

His temperature had risen steadily, nearly back to average now. His hand is blissfully warm under Shota’s own, but he’s still unconscious.

He’s still not okay.

They’d let him hurt himself, they’d let him be too *kind* and now they...

They might never get him back.

What Izuku feels, when his brain finally clears from the overwhelming fog that has come over him as soon as his hand had settled along Kurogiri’s jaw, is a familiar, yet entirely foreign feeling of weightlessness.

For a long second, he can’t place where he is.

He blinks hazy eyes open and scans his surroundings.

All at once it clicks into place.

“How long has it been?” Izuku croaks out hoarsely, gaze drifting slowly.

The breathy response comes just a second later, and Izuku’s unsurprised to find he’s not alone.

The disembodied voice he hadn’t bothered searching for the figure of replies sympathetically, sounding as unsurprised to be acknowledged without Izuku even looking in his direction as Izuku had sounded acknowledging the figure, “not long.”

There’s a long second before the voice, First, obviously, considering Izuku was in One for All again and none of the other vestiges were ever around unless he needed them directly, continues softly, “time works a bit differently here. You’re still…” the vestige hesitates, “at this moment in the real world, you’re still touching the Nomu although your friend has been… well, I… I’ll admit, Ninth, that I never thought something like this would be possible.”

“Something like wh—” Izuku cuts himself off, glancing quickly to the vestige before letting his gaze follow First’s own gaze downwards.

And there, laid out on his side, was Oboro.

“What the hell did I do?” Izuku breathes out hurriedly, rushing towards the ghost despite the inky green of the One for All *realm* clinging to his lower half. “D-did I— I-Is he… will he be—”

“He’ll be fine,” First assures gently. “I’m not entirely sure how you pulled this off, but he’s okay. You were right. About his connection to One for All, when you were talking to those two Heroes. Aizawa and Yamada, right? The Quirk does consider him an extension of you, so he was able to… when I pulled you away, you brought him with you.”

“You pulled me away?” Izuku asks slowly. “Why?”

“I’ve never seen One for All produce energy like this,” First shakes his head slowly, “I didn’t quite know what it would do to you. I’ve seen One for All since the start of its existence but… I… I’m not sure I’ve ever seen it reach this level of power.”

Izuku remains quiet, letting that thought sink in.

First would’ve seen a lot of power from the Quirk if he’d been watching from the start. Not only from the seven wielders prior to All Might, but Izuku knows how strong Yagi-san had been with it, so to

know that even First hadn't seen the kind of power that had coursed through Izuku's body, that he'd physically drawn Izuku into One for All for safety...

It's a lot to think about.

The vestige looks away for a second before his gaze is back on Izuku, expression almost disapproving, "this wasn't a very smart move, Ninth. I... I'm not sure what will happen. Your temperature has dropped significantly and your heart..."

"My... heart? Am I *dying*?" Izuku breathes out, setting a hand on Oboro's side. The ghost barely stirs, but he does move faintly; enough so that Izuku knows he's not dead.

Or... not ghost dead?

Still, it's relieving.

The silence is loud to Izuku's ears when he realizes First hadn't answered him.

Izuku whips around to face the vestige, "am I...?"

"I don't know," the vestige confesses, almost sounding worried. "Quirks have changed the biology of humankind. I lived during a period where Quirks were new, biology changing to contain Quirks to their fullest extent. Humans advancing. Ninth you... your body is one of a Quirkless person."

"But I... have a Quirk," Izuku swallows roughly. "I've always had a Quirk. I can see ghosts. I can touch ghosts! I made Oboro *visible*, I made him *solid*! That's has to be—"

"Your body is Quirkless," First repeats softly. "Your body was never meant to house a Quirk. You... couldn't have had a Quirk, Ninth. That's simply how our world works. How Quirks work. Prior to One for All, you didn't have a Quirk factor. You can see ghosts but that's... that's all it is."

"But my Quirk..."

"I know," First sighs again. "I've been thinking about it. After the Hosu incident, when we met for the first time, I told you that you needed to control your Quirk before you'd be able to master One for All. Your ability to see us so openly opened a door to new dangers

that no one was prepared for. Our presence is chilling, your friend's presence is chilling, that was all true, but... he was never using you. I'm afraid I was wrong in my assessment; I just couldn't see it then. I don't think you... that you've... Look, Ninth, I believe it was your friend who initiated all of this."

"Oboro?" Izuku looks down at his still unconscious friend, the hand resting on the solid form of the ghost tightening faintly, "what do you mean? He doesn't have any Quirk besides Cloud. How could he..."

"All for One changes DNA structures," First explains simply. "Accepting One for All mutated your DNA, but it never changed your biology."

The pale vestige cards his fingers through his hair as he pauses for a second, "to take or receive a Quirk, he's essentially taking a piece of you or... or *giving* you a piece of himself that he'd taken from elsewhere. Anything that touches his Quirk belongs to him, even if for a short period of time. His DNA overpowers. Quirks are ingrained in our DNA. In our biology. When my brother gave me One for All all those years ago, I believe it... left a bit of himself. And when he used your friend's body to create a Nomu, he... gave him an additional Quirk too. A piece of All for One."

"I don't understand," Izuku whispers. "Please, I don't..."

"Our Quirks revolve around DNA," First continues, "One for All revolves around DNA. That is how the Quirk is passed along, isn't it? The Quirk you have has my DNA. It has the second, third and fourth user's DNA; it has *all* of the users prior to you. As soon as you accept the Quirk, a piece of you is embedded into the Quirk as it merges with your own DNA. That includes Yagi, you and... and my brother. It was in his hands before any of us."

Izuku nods slowly, trying to process this. "But my Quirk—"

"Your biology isn't that of someone with a Quirk," First offers slowly, kindly and sympathetic. "You have the toe joint. Your body was never meant to manifest a Quirk. Your *heart* was never meant to manifest a Quirk, especially not something of such power."

"But then how..."

"I believe your friend is the answer to that," First cocks his head down to look at Oboro. "You thought, as did I, that your friend was using your Quirk— your ability to see ghosts but I... don't think that's the

case. One for All does consider him an extension of you or... perhaps it considers him an extension of One for All *itself*.

“My brother gave the Nomu a Quirk. It possesses the same traces of DNA that you, I, and One for All itself possesses. It’s in the same way that One for All still acknowledges Toshinori as a wielder, even if he hasn’t joined us yet; while he was using those remaining embers of One for All when you actually possessed the Quirk. Your friend may not have realized, may not have even known, but there was a connection between the two of you before you’d even met.”

“He’s been using... it was One for All all this time?”

First shrugs faintly, but does bow his head a nod, “I think it’s very likely.”

Izuku is quiet for a long second. “Is One for All going to kill me?”

First sighs heavily, looking away, “I think trying to access the sheer amount of power needed to, not only consume the energy of a person, like you did to bring your friend along with you, but attempt to force out my brother’s possession over your friend’s body... your heart wasn’t prepared to handle a Quirk like that. Your body was unprepared for such sheer energy. Frankly, I’m not sure even a body evolved to possess a Quirk would be able to handle such an event.”

“Will I live?” Izuku whispers, mind flashing to Shota and Hizashi. He’d just gotten a family. Was he... was he going to lose it? Then his brain flicks to Oboro. The ghost is still before him, “will *he* live? I-I need something to come of this. I need to know I didn’t give it all up for... for *nothing*. That I didn’t risk everything for...”

“I don’t know,” First repeats calmly. “I suppose it’ll come down to what’s happening out there. How they’ll handle what’s to come. Your body is going to fail very shortly. Your heart is going to give out. Your life will be in their hands. Those outside the Quirk. Just know, Ninth, you’re safe here, whether you... wake up, or whether you...”

The vestige kindly doesn’t finish his thought.

Izuku doesn’t think he could hear the words without breaking down.

Izuku turns his attention downwards to Oboro, “will he be okay? In... um, in here? With us?”

“One for All believes he belongs here,” First shrugs awkwardly,

though he also looks confused, “though his consciousness isn’t supposed to be here. It’s a strain to come to One for All’s plane of existence, even for someone who possesses the Quirk, so I’m not surprised he hasn’t stirred. You’re welcome to try to wake him up. I didn’t try. He has a… *distaste* for me, doesn’t he?”

Izuku bites back a smile at First’s hesitance to admit such a thing.

Izuku shakes away the moment of amusement, hand still on the ghost giving a light shake, “Oboro? You’re, uh, gonna want to wake up, I think.”

“Izuku, man, five more minutes,” the ghost moans out, curling closer into himself. “I’m exhausted.”

“Oboro, buddy,” Izuku snorts out, “we’re not alone.”

“You’re in my world, Shirakumo-kun,” First adds calmly, watching the exchange with a furrowed brow, “you’re quite the marvel. A… ghost able to access One for All’s power. I think it’s due time we met.”

Oboro’s eyes blink open and he pushes himself up quickly when the new voice registers.

For a second, the ghost just blinks owlishly, attention fliting around the plane of One for All.

“Are we dead?” Oboro breaths tiredly, looking back at Izuku almost disapprovingly.

Izuku narrows his eyes right back, urging the ghost to say something stupid about them trying to reunite Oboro with his body. It’s not like it was Izuku’s idea in the first place. Not only had Oboro been the one to spark the idea, insist a bit too, but it was the two of them in that cell too, not just Izuku.

“Not yet,” First says easily.

Izuku can’t tell if he’s joking or not. Izuku doesn’t want to know either way.

Oboro whips around to face First.

“Izuku,” Oboro says calmly, “what the fuck is going on? Where are we? Who is…”

Oboro freezes glancing around once again, seeming to really take in

his surroundings before an unimpressed expression settles on his face and he turns back to face First.

The ghost's arms cross tightly over his chest, regarding First in an unfriendly manner, "you must be the asshole first wielder of One for All who gave him a new Quirk after telling him he wasn't ready."

First's expression doesn't change, "I suppose that would be me."

Oboro's eyes narrow as he finally pushes himself up; first to his knees and then up so he's standing between the vestige and the green-haired teenager. Izuku follows suit, a bit unbalanced with One for All clinging to his legs.

Oboro, Izuku notices, doesn't have the same possessive cling to him.

First is still enveloped by the Quirk, as if it's a part of him by how it wisps off his frame, and it's consuming Izuku again, just his lower half so far, as if staking claim on him too, but Oboro is untouched.

Maybe One for All hasn't completely claimed him. Or maybe it's just because Oboro never actually possessed the Quirk, even if he'd been using it unknowingly.

"You've got some nerve, Vestige."

"Oboro," Izuku chides disapprovingly.

First doesn't seem offended, just scans Oboro thoughtfully before cocking his head faintly to the side.

"I don't have control of the Quirk," First informs before Oboro can speak. "I may be able to offer information, and draw Ninth here, when the need arises, but I can't control how, or when, One for All offers power. And I don't have any control of the Quirks that came after my time as a wielder. None of us do. You're rightfully angry, and I understand that after watching Ninth struggle, but I'm glad One for All if finally showing us its true potential in Ninth's hands. It gives him what he needs, when he needs it. As it's done for all of us."

"Are you saying it's *sentient*?" Oboro cocks an eyebrow, anger draining faintly.

"One for All is a breed of its own," First shrugs uncertainly. It's an answer without truly answering. It's weird that even after so long, so long *in* the Quirk itself, First still doesn't understand either. "It's not

this, nor that. It is what it is. Not even I know it's true potential, nor did I know that a wielder could even be *capable* of manifesting the Quirks of our past wielders. I suppose Ninth here is also a breed of his own with that ability of his. Fated to inherit One for All's true power."

Oboro is quiet for a long second, "how am I here?"

"Ninth brought you here." First bows his head, "I was unaware of just how *entwined* the two of you got when you accessed One for All's power. I brought Ninth and you... you came as an extension of him. You are here, but you don't belong here."

"Hang on," Oboro blinks wide eyes, "since *I* accessed One for All's power?"

"I don't have a Quirk," Izuku admits to his friend, gaze trained on the floor. "I can see ghosts but I... everything that happened, that wasn't me, Oboro, that was *you*."

"It wasn't me," Oboro lifts his hands in surrender, as if they're accusing him instead of telling him what they've realized. "How the hell would I do that anyways? I'd never—"

"It's not a conscious decision," First shrugs simply. "You don't decide, it just happens. I've been watching you both with your Quirks; Shirakumo and Cloud and you, Ninth, with One for All. As I said, One for All offers us what we need, when we need it. You're an extension of Ninth, so you've been accessing it through Ninth."

"I don't..." Oboro is staring wide-eyed now, attention flicking between Izuku and the First vestige. "How is that even possible?"

First glances at Izuku for a long second before offering another light shrug, "I've come to the conclusion that it's because of both your proximity to Ninth as a being without a true form, as well as your connection to One for All itself."

Oboro blinks owlishly before whipping around to face Izuku.

"He's talking in riddles," the ghost accuses, "what does he mean?"

"Your body," Izuku offers slowly. "Kurogiri has a Quirk that you don't. Cloud has been changed or... or altered, or even just put on the back burner in exchange for the transportation Quirk Shigaraki has been using. The void-portal one. But it's still you. Still your body."

“So?” Oboro whines uncertainly.

“So we’re connected,” Izuku offers a light smile. “By DNA. All for One’s DNA specifically. When he gave your body a Quirk and when... when I inherited One for All from Yagi-san, our DNA changed a bit.”

“Wait, wait,” Oboro breathes out, a deep frown settling on his lips in genuine disgust, “That means... Awh gross, you mean to tell me that I’ve got some wrinkly old villain’s DNA in me?”

“That’s... one way to put it,” First snorts out something that sounds suspiciously like a laugh, head bowing in a nod. “Unfortunately, anyone to possess One for All or... anyone who’s *interacted* with my brother’s Quirk, whether willing or not, will have an essence of his DNA fused into theirs. That’s just the fact of his Quirk. I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t do it, what’s with One for All wielders apologizing for things that aren’t their fault?” Oboro mutters gruffly. Izuku glances at First, only slightly surprised to see the vestige glancing his way in return. “So, it’s... that DNA that made me able to... to what? Use One for All? I’ve never been able to do what Izuku does, so I don’t know...”

“Access your own Quirk,” First corrects kindly. “You’ve never been able to access One for All as a whole, just... maybe the residual energy? Even as an extension of Ninth, you’d never been given One for All. It can only be passed willingly, and Ninth never intended to pass it to you. One for All strengthens what already exists. You used your Quirk, and you had more power when doing so, right?”

Oboro nods slowly, prompting an agreeing nod from First himself.

“It’s just as Ninth is able to manifest Quirks of the users before him. I believe One for All considers you a branch of itself, like the Quirks of the past users that it’s held onto. I was unaware it was stockpiling Quirks as well. We were just as surprised when Daigorō’s Quirk manifested in Ninth. I’m not sure how that would’ve played out if Ninth couldn’t see us.”

The vestige continues thoughtfully, “I think you tapped into that power by proximity, and it made you stronger. It accepted you as both a part of Nine, and a part of itself, but Ninth is the wielder and your DNA structure, though similar because of my brother’s interference, is different. Ninth may not have a Quirk, but his ability to see spirits opened the door to that proximity.”

“How can you be sure though?” Izuku asks softly.

He really doesn't want to admit he'd still been Quirkless all this time.

He'd liked the thought that his weirdness was normal because it was a Quirk. Quirks were normal. But it's not a Quirk, and he's just weird again. He's weird again, and he doesn't have any excuses.

"You could not touch the girl," First says quietly, just to Izuku. He looks apologetic, but truthful. "You've never been able to touch any of them, have you? Ninth, the criteria was met in the bar and you still... You weren't able to interact with the child. I know you've always wondered *why*. I don't know for sure, but I do know you can't have a Quirk by typical, natural manifestation standards without having a body equipped to handle one. You were never meant to have a Quirk."

Izuku brings a hand up to palm at his eyes, bowing his head in a nod.

It makes sense.

He really hadn't been able to figure out why it worked with Oboro, but not with Hana. First is right, the criteria was met that day in the bar. Maybe he didn't have a whole lot of energy that day, but he'd done more with less with Oboro.

It had been a thought in the back of his mind since Hana had gone right through him, unable to use his energy like Oboro did. It had just never made sense, considering how desperate Izuku was for Hana to help them. Desperation had always been a force activation, hadn't it? So why hadn't it worked then?

It wouldn't work if there was no Quirk to activate. If Oboro was the one doing it, and if he wasn't there, there was nothing Izuku could've done.

Izuku supposes it's nice to have an answer after all this time.

"So will..." Izuku bite hard at his lip, "will it hurt me? One for All? If I keep using it?"

"It has," First admits. "But I think when... there's not something else feeding off of it... I don't think it'll be as much of a risk. Your temperature will still play a factor, simply because you can see us and we're a part of you now, but you shouldn't have any problems. No more than any of the previous wielders have had. We just have more freedom to aid you in your fight. No more attempting to reunite lost souls to their bodies though."

Izuku snorts out a soft laugh, ducking his head in a nod of agreement.

“He won't die though, will he?” Oboro swallows roughly.

“That’s out of our hands,” First tucks his hands in the pockets of his pants. “Time is still ticking; it does still pass in the outside world even when you’re here. Ninth, you need to transfer your friend out of One for All. I fear the longer he stays with me, the less likely it’ll be he’s able to leave. Unless, of course, you’d like to join us in One for All?”

“Pass,” Oboro winces. “Talk about counterproductive. How do I leave?”

First glances at Izuku, frowning thoughtfully, “it’s on you, Ninth. It’s yours now, One for All. My control is limited, and I’m afraid bringing you here was the peak of my capabilities now.”

“B-but how?” Izuku squeaks out, shooting a wide-eyed glance back at Oboro.

“Use the Quirk,” First offers easily, as if all of this isn’t insanely impossible.

First turns back to Oboro, head cocking faintly, “you’ve been sharing the power, use it together one last time. If you’re reunited with your body, One for All will likely no longer consider you a part of Ninth. Be prepared for that, whatever it may entail. You’re going to need a lot of energy if you want to overpower the Nomu programming my brother constructed. Use One for All once more as a team. You’re no stranger to One for All’s power. You’ve both got experience with the Quirk, whether you’d realized it or not. Put it to use. Don’t let this all be in vain.”

Izuku draws in a deep breath, finally turning back to Oboro. “You ready to fight for your life?”

“I’ve been ready since I lost it,” Oboro’s eyes are dark with determination.

Izuku holds his hand out, the only thing he can think to do. Oboro stares for a long second, before his eyes flick up to Izuku, “see you on the other side?”

“Yeah,” Izuku offers a watery smile, “you bet.”

Oboro bows his head in a nod, hand slapping into Izuku’s outstretched

one, lacking the distinct *clap* of their hands hitting one another considering their states of bodyless consciousnesses.

He feels the ghost for just a second, their hands locked together, and then Izuku thinks about Kurogiri, Oboro's body, and then... then he's gone.

Izuku blinks owlishly, drawing in an unsteady breath as if hand clenches around nothing.

An energy surge shocks through Izuku, and he wonders if this is what it feels like when One for All is active for the vestiges. It's weird activating something when he's not exactly there to feel the power in his body. One for All always feels like a thrill when it activates, but it feels a bit different *in* the Quirk.

He hopes Oboro wins.

He doesn't want this to have been for nothing in the end.

"Did-did it work?" Izuku whirls around to face First when he comes back to his senses. "Is he... do you think he made it back into his body?"

The vestige shrugs helplessly.

A strange, breathless feeling settles in Izuku's chest. He lifts a desperate hand to clutch at the shirt over the strange feeling, wide eyes falling on First. The vestige doesn't look surprised, only a bit mournful.

"What's—" Izuku draws in a sharp breath. "What's happening?"

"Your heart stopped," First bows his head, "it's out of our hands."

Izuku comes to very slowly.

He knows before he even opens his eyes that he's in the hospital.

The first thing he decides, upon his return to consciousness, is that he's blissfully warm. It's easy to sink into the warmth without even opening his eyes.

The second is that there's an obnoxious beating of what he assumes is a heart monitor. It's loud and obnoxious and repetitive, but that's probably a good thing, right? Despite the annoyance he feels at the

sound disturbing the serenity of the room, he's happy to hear such a noise.

That means he's alive, doesn't it? It's a good sound to hear, especially if what First said is right.

If his heart did stop.

Izuku shifts faintly under the covers, drawing in a slow breath through his nose. His mouth feels dry and there's a haziness he can't seem to shake even as he moves under the covers.

"Sunshine?"

The teen offers an acknowledging hum. Izuku licks at dry lips before squinting his eyes open. He takes a couple more shallow breaths before finally feeling like he's awake enough to speak.

"Papa?"

"Yeah," comes a watery laugh, and then Izuku feels a hand on his own and there's a gentle squeeze. He lets his head lull in that direction, tired eyes finding Hizashi. The man looks worse for the wear, eyes tired and bags colouring the skin under his eyes. Izuku wonders if he's gone home at all. He also wonders how long he's been in the hospital. "We're both here, my little love. You're okay, yeah? You're okay. I'm so glad you're finally awake. We were so worried, Izuku. You're okay now."

"'m okay," Izuku agrees drowsily. "Dad's here?"

"Right here," Shota says softly. A different hand, hardened with callouses, flattens over his other wrist, a thumb dragging light lines across the top as his hand. It's nice, Izuku thinks. "How are you feeling, Kid?"

"I... haven't decided yet," Izuku tells him without thought. He hasn't really processed anything yet and though he's awake, he doesn't really feel *there*. Being in One for All will do that to you, he thinks. "'m alive though."

"Yeah," Hizashi breathes out desperately, hand tightening on Izuku's like the truth of Izuku's words is washing over him after a wait, "you sure are, Sunshine. You gave us quite a scare though. God, I'm so glad you're okay. That you're awake. I missed you so much, Baby. I was so scared, Izuku. We were so scared."

“I’m sorry,” Izuku whispers out. “I didn’t think that would happen. I thought it would be easy. Like every other time. It’s never... been so powerful. Not even the first man to possess my Quirk has seen it emulate so much power. I guess the each passing wielder makes it stronger theory is pretty legit, huh?”

“That’s terrifying,” Shota snorts out, thumb still stroking along Izuku’s wrist.

“Yeah,” Izuku agrees lightly. “I’ve never felt power like that. What actually happened?”

“You...” Hizashi sucks in a panicked breath, looking away sharply and brushing away the tears clinging to his lashes under his glasses, “you very nearly almost died, sweetheart. You... your— your—”

“My heart stopped,” Izuku lets his gaze settle on the ceiling panels just so he doesn’t have to look at either guardian. He doesn’t need that explained. He remembers that. “I... I know that. I felt it. One for All protected my consciousness and you guys... First, the, um, the first to inherit my Quirk, said it was in your hands, so thank you for taking care of me.”

“Oh, my sweet baby,” Hizashi coos gently, hand lifting off of Izuku’s hand to push back his mess of green bangs, “that’s never something you need to thank us do ya’dig? Your life was our priority, and... I’m so sorry we let it get out of hand.”

“We shouldn’t have let you do this,” Shota continues quietly. “We never should’ve let you put yourself on the line on the off chance something... we could’ve lost both of you. We’re the adults, and we should’ve been the voice of reason in this. We’re sorry, Kid. You should’ve never been able to try, should’ve never been able to put yourself in unnecessary danger.”

Izuku is quiet for a long second. He sucks in a breath of defeat, squeezing his eyes shut, “did it... not work? D-did I *fail?* Is he...”

Hizashi thumbs at Izuku’s cheek with a gentle touch before he shifts to the side a bit.

Izuku glances over, lulling his head in Hizashi’s direction only to choke on a breath when he sees that there, in the bed next to him, lays Oboro. He pushes himself up a bit, gaze flicking quickly to the machines attached to the other’s body, squinting hard to read the machine only for a hollow feeling of hopefulness to settle in his chest.

A heartbeat.

Oboro has a heartbeat.

Kurogiri didn't.

A Nomu wouldn't.

"He's..." Shota hesitates, frowning, "he's alive.... but..."

"We're not really sure *who*'s in there," Hizashi continues gently, hand now on Izuku's shoulder where he gently eases Izuku back into the pillows. "It could be... It could be Oboro, but it might still be the Nomu."

"If he fought like he said he was going to then it's Oboro," Izuku tells them sharply. Only wincing back into the pillows when his guardians share a surprised look. "Sorry, just—"

"I love your positivity," Hizashi offers a light smile, brushing off the outburst. "We get it. Oboro's a fighter so I... I hope you're right, Sunshine. If anyone would fight like hell, I know it would be him."

"Just..." Shota looks away, "just remember you tried your hardest, even if... Please remember that some things can't be fixed, Izuku. No matter how hard you try. No matter what you *give*. All for One is powerful and whatever they did to him, to... to *create* Kurogiri, it's bound to be strong too. I don't want you to blame yourself if this doesn't work out the way you want it to."

Izuku turns that over in his head a couple times before his emotions start to crack.

If it really is Kurogiri still in Oboro's body, then...

"I don't see him here," Izuku croaks out. "If... if it doesn't work out the way I want it to then I... I—"

"Shh," Hizashi is up now, perching on the edge of Izuku's hospital bed to he can set an arm over Izuku's shoulders. Izuku instantly turns into the embrace, burying his face in Hizashi's side. "You did far more than anyone should've asked of you, sunshine. Whatever happens, it's not your fault. You *tried*, okay? That's all anyone can do."

Izuku can only cry harder when he thinks of losing Oboro as a ghost and not getting him back as a living person again. What if he's... what

if he's gone?

He doesn't know what he'll do without his best friend around in some form or another.

When he calms down, his guardians tell him a bit more about what happened at Tartarus. How Oboro had disappeared without a trace, and only a moment later Izuku lost consciousness, the flatlining of his heart following only a second later.

Izuku doesn't like the grim, self-loathing looks in both of his guardian's gazes as they tell him from their perspectives. Izuku is sorry he made them witness such a thing. He can only imagine how scared they must've been.

He knows he'd do it as many times as it takes if there was even a chance Oboro might be able to come back. Izuku wisely doesn't mention that to his guardians.

Izuku tries to match everything up with what was said in the Quirk.

With what First had been telling him.

It all lines up.

From time passing differently in the Quirk, to Izuku's heart stopping in the real world. Even from Oboro disappearing from sight around the same time Izuku's consciousness had been drawn into the One for All realm. They'd gone together after all, but that's where the timing gets a bit wonky.

He doesn't remember much past his heart giving out, the period of time between that moment and waking up, three days later, apparently.

He wonders if First had been watching over him in the Quirk. He can't remember.

Izuku's guardians fawn over him. He's checked over by a nurse, and then a doctor comes in to speak with him, glad to see him awake. Shota and Hizashi don't leave the room once, and Izuku has a bad feeling that this is what the past couple days have looked like for the two of them.

They're cautious about his temperature, and they're insistent about getting him to drink some water, and even insisting he eat the meal

the hospital staff brings up for him.

“If you wanna be home before Christmas, you’ve gotta jump through the hospital’s hoops, kiddo.”

Izuku enjoys the comfort that comes with being awake.

Neither man seems too keen to go too far away, and he’s usually got one of them touching him in some way— Hizashi's hand on his ankle as the man reads through emails, Shota’s elbow touching Izuku’s side as the man rests his eyes with his arms crossed on the surface of Izuku’s mattress. Hizashi perched on the edge of his bed just carding his fingers through Izuku’s curls, and Shota tucking him under his arm as he leans back against the pillows too.

Everyone’s attention still drifts to Oboro, watching over him as well. He hasn’t shown any signs of stirring still, but Izuku is hopeful Oboro will wake up and that he’ll… that it’ll actually be Oboro back in his body, where he belongs.

It’s drawing closer to evening when the bed beside Izuku’s shifts with movement.

Izuku jerks up, startling Shota awake, and Hizashi, who’d been silently staring off into space at Izuku’s side jolts up too, both guardian’s following Izuku’s gaze.

Hizashi is the first over to Oboro’s bed, swallowing roughly as he pauses at his bedside, “…Oboro?”

The body sucks in a rough breath, eyes squeezing shut, “why does it feel like I just got crushed by a building?”

Relief has Izuku sinking back into his pillows as he tries to swallow back the tears. It worked. They… they’d made it work. They’d brought him back. He was alive and Kurogiri— Kurogiri was gone. That was Oboro. He was back. He was alive.

“Because you got crushed by a building?” Shota suggests drily from Izuku’s side. “How are you feeling?”

“Rough,” Oboro lets out a pained laugh. The ghost (Izuku faintly wonders if that’s an incorrect term now?) *Oboro* finally opens his eyes, glancing to the side.

For a long second he just stares and then his head cocks to the side

faintly as he glances between Shota and Hizashi. “Wow, you two look *old*. What happened there?”

Hizashi draws in a shaky breath, and Izuku feels Shota tense at his side.

Izuku considers the words for a long second, tried hard to process them.

...

Izuku feels like he can’t breathe.

It feels like Oboro had just dumped a bucket of ice water over his head. He doesn’t think he breathes for a second, then he feels Shota’s hand on his back, rubbing a light circle over his shoulder.

It takes a second longer for Izuku to realize he’s tearing up again.

Oboro doesn’t… he doesn’t *remember*?

He roughly drags his fists over his eyes, trying to swallow down the sobs.

He doesn’t want to disturb the other, especially if Oboro doesn’t remember him—

“Izuku,” comes Oboro’s breathy voice, “hey, what’s wrong? It... worked, yeah? I’m here. Where’s the smile? I’m back— I'm alive! C’mon, don’t cry! *Please*, don’t cry or I’ll cry too!”

And Izuku does sob now, wiping furiously at his eyes as he pushes himself out of bed and all but throws himself at Oboro. He’s hardly aware of the wounded sound the other makes, or the sharp inhale Oboro sucks in when Izuku collides with him.

Only a second later Oboro’s arms wrap around him in return.

Izuku melts into the light squeeze Oboro gives.

“I-I,” Izuku cries out, “I thought you didn’t remember me!”

“What?” Oboro sounds breathless. “*O-oh*, because I said...”

“You’re such an-an asshole!” Izuku sobs into the other’s chest, a tight feeling of anger and relief swirling in his chest as his fists tighten in the papery hospital pajamas Oboro wears. “I hate you. You’re the

worst, but I can't imagine my life without you!"

"Dude," Hizashi tuts disapprovingly.

"I'm sorry," Oboro coos back to Izuku, genuinely apologetic, "really. I'm so sorry, buddy. I didn't mean to—I just, it's been so long, y'know? I thought— I don't know what I thought. I don't think I did think. Just... just said it. Man, I am an asshole, why do you people even like me? I'm so sorry, Izuku. I didn't mean to scare you. I'm okay. I remember you. I... remember it *all*. And you're my best friend! How could I ever forget you, huh?"

Izuku just presses his face further into the ghost's chest, heart feeling warm at the steady beating he feels. Oboro has a real body again. He's got a real, beating heart and his chest rises and falls with breaths.

A new round of tears prick in Izuku's eyes.

"Hey, it's okay... *I'm* okay. Eyes up for a second, dude," Oboro's finger hooks under Izuku's chin, forcing his gaze up. The blue-haired teen offers a light, tired smile, "do you think I'd forget you after everything you did for me? Everything we've been through? Fat chance, Kid. You risked... *everything* for me. I'm sorry I didn't think before speaking. I should work on that."

"s'okay," Izuku whispers, nuzzling back into his friend. "You're still an asshole."

"Oh, definitely," Oboro laughs in agreement, chest rumbling along with the sound. "Always. I think it's a part of my charm, you know?"

Shota snorts a laugh in the distance and Hizashi lets out a wet sounding snicker.

When Izuku finally glances over, Shota and Hizashi both have tears in their eyes as they watch Izuku and Oboro. They're both standing at Oboro's bedside now, soft, fond looks on their faces. Izuku spots their hands clutching at each other's like they're both restraining themselves from interrupting.

Izuku can't help but feel thankful, even if they've known Oboro longer.

Izuku shifts, and only when Oboro lets out another wounded sound does the teen remember he'd been terribly injured and was still probably sore.

“Oh God!” Izuku squeaks out, trying to scramble off his friend without injuring him anymore. He doesn’t get very far as Oboro’s arms lock over his shoulders, holding him in place. He fights halfheartedly against Oboro, not wanting to hurt him anymore.

“You’re hurt,” Izuku insists flatly, letting himself go boneless despite the words.

“No, don’t go! I *feel* pain,” Oboro sounds far too happy about that. He’s smiling even as he winces. “I feel it, oh wow, I forgot how much hurt *hurts*. Yikes. Just... give me a second. Don’t leave, but also don’t move. Ouch.”

“Masochist,” Shota scoffs under his breath to Hizashi.

Oboro lets out a full bellied laugh, attention lulling in Shota’s direction. “Glad to see you’re still a *prick*, Shocchan. I missed you. And you too, ‘zashi, of course! I’d literally die for a *real* hug from you two after I get my turn cuddling our kid.”

“I don’t believe you have any rights to him,” Shota cocks an eyebrow. “I don’t remember seeing any Shirakumo Oboro on any of that paperwork we signed.”

“You don’t need paperwork to be a good parent!”

“You’re *not* my parent,” Izuku just knows his cheeks have flushed pink, “I hate you.”

“Well, you’ve got a weird way of showing it,” Oboro chuckles, hugging him a bit closer. “I guess it’s kind weird now that I’m alive again, huh?”

“It was *always* weird,” Izuku retorts under his breath. “You just never acknowledged it, and I guess it wasn’t that bad when I was the only one suffering. You’re always weird.”

“Yeah,” Oboro agrees with a bright smile, “but there’s nothing wrong with that, is there?”

Izuku thinks back to his time in the Quirk with First and Oboro.

“No,” he agrees softly, “I guess there isn’t.”

A lot happens after Oboro wakes up.

Detective Tsukauchi comes around, looking a bit skeptical of Oboro despite the relief in his gaze when he sees both Izuku and Oboro awake. They're sat in one hospital bed side by side even though the doctors and nurses have constantly been corralling them into their own beds whenever they see it.

Hizashi and Shota don't say anything about Izuku sneaking out of bed after all medical personnel leaves the room after their checks and rounds.

Izuku figures if his guardians don't have a problem with it, medical staff shouldn't either. And it's not like any of them know what any of the four of them have been through in the past couple days. They have no right to keep Izuku and Oboro in separate beds if it's not causing them any harm.

Besides, Izuku feels fine now, despite the fact they're keeping him overnight for observation again.

The cover story is a simple one.

Oboro was held captive by the League of Villains since the day he was wrongfully declared deceased. Tsukauchi is still ironing out the details of that as he works on filing the paperwork that'll reverse Oboro's death certificate.

The teen's young appearance, despite over thirteen years passing since that day, is explained by the broad excuse of a Quirk like Eri-chan's rewind Quirk that had been used on Oboro while he was with the League.

It's not a solid explanation, but none of them really thinks anyone will question much further past the fact that Oboro is alive after all this time, no matter how he looks. You don't look a gift horse in the mouth, right?

That's about all the information offered up to anyone who'd known Oboro when he'd been alive. Everything else is kept hushed under the ruse of confidentiality.

Which isn't really a ruse, technically, when you think about it, it doesn't actually have to be hidden, but for both Izuku and Oboro's sake, that's the cover story they go with. It protects Izuku's secret and keeps Oboro out of the spotlight, which is important if he wants to step back into a normal-ish life.

If the League knew, Izuku isn't really sure what they'd do.

Especially after they'd taken Kurogiri from Shigaraki as well.

This is mostly for the public, the Shirakumo family, and Hitoshi's parents; those who knew Oboro personally when he was alive and would be able to tell it was actually him after he'd died all those years ago.

Very few people are offered the actual story.

Nezu and Recovery Girl are the first, informed upon arrival when they come in for Oboro to receive a healing treatment from the old woman. The rodent looks oddly pleased as he surveys Oboro intently, and Recovery Girl brushes away tears as she pinches Oboro's cheek in a very grandmotherly fashion.

It's Oboro's sixteenth healing session, Izuku is told.

That thought makes him a bit queasy.

Nemuri and Iida Tensei are the next two to find out.

They're told by Shota and Hizashi in the hallways before the two rush into the room, Nemuri throwing herself onto Oboro, while Tensei, still recovering, and mostly wheelchair bound still despite his improvements in rehabilitation, settling at the side of the bed to take Oboro's hand into his own.

Iida Tenya is always quite proud to talk about his older brother whenever he can.

They're both reasonably shocked to find Oboro there— *alive*— and there's a lot of crying when the five friends are reunited after so long. They don't leave until the nurses kick them out when visiting hours are over.

It's a good think Izuku is still considered a child and his guardians are allowed to stay still.

He doesn't want them to leave.

Hitoshi is the last to know, arriving in early the following morning after his mother drops him off, stopping frozen in their hospital room when he spots Oboro on one of the beds too, heart monitor still beeping, announcing the fact that he was very much alive.

Izuku snickers to himself at Hitoshi's mind-blown expression.

"Tell me I'm not crazy," the purple-haired teen mutters in shock.

A beat passes.

"What the hell is wrong with the two of you? You-" Hitoshi carries on before either can get a word in, pointing an accusatory finger at Izuku, "-basically *died* and you-" attention on Oboro now, "-*came back to life*? I think you two idiots are a bit backwards there! Not that I'm not glad you're alive, Ro, but you're both *insane*! What the hell happened?"

So, they told him everything because he already knows most of it anyways.

Izuku gets released from the hospital, but they stay with Oboro still.

The blue-haired teen's family had been called right after he'd woken up and been checked out by Tsukauchi just to ensure it was actually him and not Kurogiri—

They arrive not even three hours later.

Hizashi is the one who heads down to the receptionist's area to bring Oboro's family up to his room. It's easier than making them find the room by themselves, especially in a secluded part of the hospital, courtesy of Detective Tsukauchi who pulled some string.

"They were definitely speeding to get here so fast," Oboro tells Shota and Izuku in amusement. His eyes are wide with anticipation, but there's also a dull nervousness in his gaze.

Izuku slips his hand into Oboro's smiling crookedly when Oboro gives his hand a squeeze in thanks.

"I think anyone who just learned their kid was alive after so long would gladly break a couple laws to make it to them," Shota snorts back, smiling gently at Izuku even though he'd obviously talking to Oboro. "I would."

That reunion is one that makes Izuku cry, even from where he's tucked under Shota's arm and out of the chaos of people, people strikingly similar to Oboro, rushing the bed and desperately hugging the teen.

If he thought there was a lot of crying between the school friends, he

stands corrected when the Shirakumo family is finally reunited with their lost member.

Oboro's parents, all of his siblings, and even a couple of his sibling's spouses squeeze into the room despite the room limit. It's almost a bit suffocating, but it's also so lively, thankful and happy. Oboro is grinning so wide it must hurt as he clutches at his parents and hugs his siblings; laughing through tears as he mumbles back sentiments being whispered to him.

He tells them he doesn't remember what happened.

He tells them that he doesn't remember anything.

His family seems relieved.

Oboro gets discharged to his parents just before dinner time that same day Izuku is discharged. His heart is in his throat when it's just him and Oboro alone in the room after a near constant flood of people. The cluster of Shirakumos has been ushered out of the room by a nurse, and Oboro's parents are down signing discharge paperwork.

Izuku isn't sure where Hizashi is, but Shota had stepped out to grab a coffee from the cafeteria.

"Are you sure they'll let you come back?" Izuku had whispered. "I mean... you died, you've been gone. Will they..."

Oboro was going home with his parents, despite how much Izuku wanted the ghost to stay close. He can't bear the thought of his friend being away from him after Oboro had been a constant in his life for so long.

"Yeah," Oboro nods slowly, "it might take some convincing, but I... know where I belong. And I know what I want to do. I'm going to be a Hero still, and there's no way they can keep me from you, bestie. Don't forget that even though I look like I'm seventeen, I am definitely still thirty-one. Trust me, dude."

"I always do," Izuku breathes out, watching with a heavy heart as Oboro finally pushes himself up from the bed.

He straightens stiffly, like it aches, wincing as he does so. They both know he'll have chronic pain, and he'll need rehabilitation before he'll be able to be enrolled in Yuuei again, but he's alive and that's all that really matters.

Oboro is hopeful that he'll be ready to enroll again by the time Izuku's class hits their second year. Then he'll be able to just jump into classes with them. Shota hadn't looked against the idea entirely, but they'd definitely need to convince him. And Principal Nezu.

Izuku secretly hopes Oboro is allowed to do that too.

The ghost smiles lightly at the soft admission as he takes the bag of clothes his sister had bought for him upon being informed that he was getting discharged and would be going home with them, heading for the bathroom adjoining their room.

And he walks straight into the door when he gets there.

Izuku bursts into a startled laugh as the older teen recoils back in shock. Izuku tries to swallow it down in fear of coming off rude. He barely managed to contain it, "a-are you okay?"

"I am... not a ghost," Oboro says wide-eyed. "That's... I'll need to get used to that again. I can't go through things. Solid door. Solid me. *Weird.*"

Izuku snorts a laugh.

Christmas arrives quickly.

Izuku doesn't see Oboro after they're separated outside the hospital.

Izuku hates it.

"They just got their son back, sweetheart," Hizashi says gently, petting Izuku's hair where they're curled up on the couch on Christmas Eve as Shota digs through the storage closet in the apartment for their bin of Christmas decorations. "You can't blame them for wanting to keep him close for a bit. We're holding onto you too, and you were only... only gone for a few minutes, ya'dig? Let them process. I know you miss him too."

Izuku doesn't reply, but he does bury his face in the blanket he has tugged up to his face.

Izuku isn't very familiar with Christmas.

It's not a holiday he and his mother ever really celebrated. Not to the extent Hizashi and Shota seem to.

They've got a small Christmas tree put up in the living room that they'd decorated as a family just last night before bed. Izuku is surprised to find presents under the tree when he stumbles from his room a bit earlier than usual the following morning.

Shota is on the couch, watching the twinkling lights of the tree as he sips at his coffee. It's still dark, so it's really pretty. Izuku is almost mesmerized by it.

Nemo is curled up in his lap, and hardly even stirs when Izuku plops down beside his guardians. Shota shifts enough so he can tuck Izuku under his arm again, both of their attention settling on the tree again. There's a distant comfort in the fact that they don't need to talk to be comfortable, Shota had just silently offered the closeness, and Izuku had all but fallen into it.

Distantly, Izuku hears the shower running.

They're quiet for a long moment, just enjoying each other's company.

"Hizashi clings to Americanized Christmas," Shota explains when Izuku finally glances over. "I humor him, so I hope you don't mind celebrating with us. It's a pretty tame Christmas for us this year after everything but... it's fine if you don't want to."

"There are presents," Izuku observes from his spot.

"Keen eye, Problem Child," Shota teases fondly. "We like to exchange gifts. There's something for everyone down there. If you're feeling up to it, we're going to have everyone over this afternoon. Nem and Eri. Tensei and Tenya are supposed to come down for a bit before their family Christmas celebration. 'toshi and his mom and dad. We invited Oboro, but his family is doing their own little Christmas celebration so I'm not sure if we'll see him. And we thought you might appreciate Yagi stopping by too. You're close to him, so we... swallowed our pride and invited him too."

"I didn't get anyone anything," Izuku frowns thoughtfully.

"Consider not dying a very appreciated gift for Hizashi and I, okay? And I'm sure no one else will blame you either, considering you spent the last little while in a hospital bed. Don't worry about it."

"That's hardly a gift," Izuku snorts back.

"*And yet* we were so happy to have received it from you anyways,"

Shota shoots back lightly, offering a tiny smile. “Seriously, Kid, it’s not about the gifts around here. It’s about the company. We just... wanted to make is special for you.”

Izuku’s heart thumps fondly in his chest, “thank you.”

When Hizashi finally surfaces, wet hair tied up in a loose bun, they enjoy each other’s company for a bit. Hizashi makes Izuku and himself hot chocolate and Izuku laughs when the man adds a handful of tiny marshmallows. Shota smiles fondly, sipping at his second cup of coffee.

Only when they all have drinks does Hizashi enthusiastically start doling out the gifts under the tree. Izuku can see what Shota was saying— the blonde is nearly vibrating in excitement.

Izuku gets some new journals and some clothes. A nice stationary set, and a pack of coloured pencils for his sketching. He’s overwhelmed by the genuine interest in him they’re expressing by each present being something he actually likes— something he’ll use.

He’s just opening the next gift Hizashi had passed over, something knitted, when a black void opens in the middle of their living room.

For a second, just a second, Izuku’s heart is in his throat until— “Oh thank all things holy, I was afraid I that wouldn’t work, and I’d end up somewhere random. Hi, friends!”

Izuku melts back into the couch, loosening the grip he’s had on the scarf he’d just opened.

“You can use Warp,” Izuku blinks as the reality of that finally crashes over him.

Oboro has had it for... for what? A couple days? And he could already travel with it.

“Yep! I’ve been practicing,” Oboro flashes a wide grin, as he plops down on the couch next to Izuku “y’know, this apartment was the first coordinates I memorized when I realized I kept the Quirk! If I’ve got dirty, gross villain DNA in me, I might as well make the best of it! I thought cloud travel was good, but instant travel is amazing!”

“How’d you convince your folks to let you come here?” Hizashi asks from his spot in front of the Christmas tree. “I didn’t think we’d see you for at least a couple more days.”

Oboro hesitates, and it's honestly very telling. There's no way he got permission to leave his parent's home. Oboro offers a sheepish laugh as he averts his gaze and rubs guiltily at the back of his neck.

"You didn't tell anyone, did you?" Shota scoffs, looking only slightly humored. "Your parents are going to flip. We are not taking the blame. Now, coffee or hot chocolate?"

"Hot chocolate!" Oboro grins, smiling thankfully as Shota stands to prepare the drink.

Oboro's grin faulters slightly as he continues, "they were hovering, I had to get away! I forgot they had a tendency to be... overbearing. And it's tenfold after all this shit. I was unprepared to be on house arrest after I just got back."

Oboro whines as he continues, "I just wanted some peace and quiet. I mean, I get it, I do, but still, I went from no interaction with anyone but 'zuku, to interaction overload! My family can be overwhelming. I'll apologize later, promise, but right now... I think this is the family I need to be with. Right, nephew?"

"Don't call me that," Izuku replies instantly, running his hand over the scarf depicting the colours of All Might's costume that's in his lap. Now that he can actually look at it, he decides that he's never loved a scarf as much as he loves this one. "I... I'm glad you're here though."

"See!" Oboro perks up, throwing an arm over Izuku's shoulder and pushing in closer. Izuku is completely used it is already. "This is definitely where I belong right now! It's practically *baby's first Christmas* over here."

Izuku puffs his cheeks out but doesn't both voicing his detest.

Hizashi still snickers under his breath before shooting Izuku an apologetic smile at the teasing. Izuku is oddly touched by the sympathy that had never been offered before since Oboro's teasing had never been heard.

"You're always welcome here," Hizashi says when he can speak without a humor lilt, passing Oboro a wrapped present, "you know that just... maybe shoot your folks a text, yeah?"

"What are you, my dad?" Oboro mopes, though he does pull his new phone from his pocket. "It's like you all forget I'm *older* than all of you. But sure, boss me around why don't'cha."

“It’s like you forget we’re parents too,” Shota fires back with cocked eyebrow.

The underground Hero is only now returning to the living room, fingers clutched around the handle of a Christmas mug Hizashi had thought was adorable in the shops. He sets the mug down on the coffee table in front of Oboro.

“There, text sent,” Oboro pouts, setting his phone down on the armrest of the couch. Only a second later Oboro’s phone buzzes and his pout deepens. He hesitates before finally picking it up to scan the new messages, where he deflates, “and would ya look at that? Text responded to. I’m thirty-one! I’m *past* grounding age! I live here now; this is your fault.”

“Denied,” Shota snorts out, but he does smile in a way that conveys that he’s not serious. Izuku knows there’s been talk of Oboro living with them if and when he’s cleared to return to school.

Oboro had enthused about bunkbeds.

“I always knew you were cruel, Shocchan,” Oboro flops back into the couch after picking up his mug, taking a sip, expression lightening as he savors the rich chocolatiness. “But I never thought you’d be this cruel.”

Shota laughs openly at that, stretching out to nudge his foot into Oboro’s from the other end of the couch. Oboro’s teasing smile softens.

“Anyways,” Hizashi snickers as he picks up another gift. “Where were we? Oh, right! This is another one for Sunshine. We… put a lot of thought into this one, Kiddo. It’s from Sho and I. We… hope you like it, ya’dig?”

“Oh, hey! I know what’s in that one!” Oboro is grinning so widely.

Izuku glances between the other teen and the gift now in his hands. If Oboro likes it, he’s suspicious of it. The box is on the bigger side, but it’s quite thin. It’s neatly wrapped with a bow. It almost feels… empty? He gives it a light shake, but it doesn’t make any noise either.

Huh.

Izuku’s nose scrunches up as he scans Oboro.

“How would you know?” Hizashi yelps out, whipping around to glare at the blue-haired teen.

Oboro’s grin just widens, “I’ve been hanging around for ages, man. I know what you guys have been up to, and believe me, it’s been a struggle keeping my mouth shut! And y’know, I saw you wrap it. He’ll totally love it, don’t look so worried.”

“Should I be worried?” Izuku cocks an eyebrow, narrowed eyes jumping between Shota and Hizashi.

“No,” Shota huffs fondly, “just open it, Problem Child.”

Izuku’s nose scrunches up, but he does as told. He gently pulls at the tail of the ribbon and watches as it unravels. He tears into the wrapping paper, frowning thoughtfully at the box when he reaches it. It’s still very flat. He has no idea what could be in there.

“Go on,” Oboro nudges Izuku’s arm, “I'm on the edge of my seat!”

“You know what’s in it,” Izuku retorts without any heat, finally easing the box open.

For a long second, he just stares at the papers in the bottom of the box. Papers. He’d gotten... papers?

“Thank you—”

“Izuku,” Shota shakes his head with a small smile, “please read them before you thank us.”

“Oh,” Izuku lets out a sheepish laugh, “uh, right, sorry.”

“Only you, Sunshine, would offer such genuine gratitude for a pile of paperwork without seeing what it is first,” Hizashi snickers adorningly. “I love you, sweetheart.”

Izuku offers a light smile at the blonde’s sentiment before finally letting his eyes drop to the box again.

He scans the first page, only to freeze when the words finally register.

Izuku sucks in a breath as tear well in his eyes, “a-are you sure?”

“We’ve never been surer about anything, Izuku,” Shota says gently.

“You’ve been our kid from the moment you stumbled in that door

after Shota the night you started staying with us. We've been thinking about this for a long time."

And there, at the bottom of the box, is adoption paperwork.

Adoption paperwork with his name on it.

Izuku just stares down at the pages, heart hammering in his chest.

"It's... not official quiet yet," Shota continues awkwardly when Izuku can't seem to find his voice. "You get a say, of course, and if you... if you don't want to be adopted, that's fine too. We just thought—"

"Yes," Izuku breathes out desperately, palming at his wet eyes, "if y-you're sure you *want* me then I—y-yeah. Please. I-I want to a part of your family—"

"Darling," Hizashi coos, pushing himself up to his feet only to lean over Izuku and wrap him in a tight hug, "you're already a part of our family. You've always been our kid."

"They've been thinking about this for ages, man," Oboro adds, a soft smile on his lips. "Shota had the paperwork started the second your mother signed away her rights to you. Her loss was their gain, eh?"

"It all just came through," Shota adds after shooting the blue-haired teen an affronted look. "We just wanted to make sure you wanted this before we finalized the paperwork and sent it off for approval. Tsukauchi promised it's already as good as approved, but he still promised to put a rush on it the moment you agreed. You'll officially be ours by tomorrow night if you're okay with it."

"I'll really be yours?" Izuku sniffles into Hizashi's chest. "You really want to keep me? *Forever*?"

"Of course, sweetheart," Hizashi breathes out, planting a kiss on the top of Izuku's head. "Forever. We want nothing else. You've always been ours; you know that. We love you, sunshine. We're just beyond glad to get to make it official. And after everything that's happened, we know how delicate time is, and we want you here for every second of it, ya'dig?"

"I love you guys," Izuku whispers, pressing his face closer to Hizashi, but catching Shota's eyes.

The dark-haired man looks so fond, Izuku is just itching to give him a

thankful hug as well.

“I’m so excited!” Oboro chirps, throwing his arms around Hizashi’s shoulder as Izuku moves to hug Shota too. “You guys are official dads! An official Dad, and an official Papa! Gah, I’m so happy for you all! And now that all this is official, guess who is now *officially* an uncle...?”

“You’re *not* my uncle,” Izuku laughs fondly, wiping the tears from his eyes.

The Christmas party is a lot of fun.

Izuku is having a good time. Everyone seems to be in high spirits, and he’s silently pleased that everyone can get alone for the sake of the holiday.

Hitoshi is teaching Iida how to play video games with Oboro.

Yagi-san is sat at the table with Shota, and Hitoshi’s father, the three of them nursing glasses of sake that Nemuri had brought. Hizashi, Yua and Nemuri are all bustling around the small kitchen, and Tensei, taking a break from his wheelchair and showing off his ability to use his legs in moderation, leans against the counter Oboro used to always sit at.

Izuku is in the living room with the rest of the teenagers, Eri sleeping soundly on the loveseat beside him. It’s early in the evening, but Nemuri had mentioned the little girl being too excited to fall asleep last night. Izuku cards his fingers through the little girl’s soft hair, enjoying the lightness of a holiday with a family.

It’s a stark difference to the Christmases he’d spent alone growing up.

It’s movement out of the corner of his eye that catches his attention.

He turns his head faintly to the side, stiffening when he notices... is that Hana?

“Deku...?” comes the child’s fearful voice.

“Hey, uh,” Izuku clears his throat, “I’ve gotta go to the bathroom. I’ll... be right back.”

Oboro cocks an eyebrow, but besides that, no one seems to mind.

Izuku still pushes himself up, making sure Eri is secured on the couch before sneaking off. He goes right past the bathroom, leading Hana into his bedroom.

“Hana,” Izuku finally greets, “what’s wrong? Are you... are you okay?”

The ghost child sniffles, fisting at her eyes before looking up at him with glossy brown eyes. “He’s scaring me, Deku,” she whispers desperately. “I don’t like it. He’s... he’s going crazy!”

“Who, Hana?”

“My brother,” Hana shakes her head, voice coming out choked, “please, Deku, you’ve gotta help him!”

Chapter End Notes

> And that's a wrap! Guys, it's over! We made it to the end! just over half a million words, over 20,000 kudos and probably way more support then this fic deserves and we're finally at the end! I'm both so relieved this is finished, yet also so sad it's done? Mixed emotions! I'll still definitely be writing ghostboi!Oboro and Izuku in other oneshots because I adore them, as much as I love that they get happy endings! I hope it all makes sense!
>
> This was the ending I always pictured, way back before season 6 came out. I still haven't watched it, but I know a lot of you have. I added the last couple paragraphs just to set this up for either a sequel, or an epilogue. I want to write my own war arc, but I also haven't finished ironing out the details for that! If you're interested in seeing that though, subscribe to or bookmark the series! I'll also still be adding other oneshots, all of which will take place while Oboro is still a ghost.
>
> Also! Even though this fic is finished, you're still welcome to comment any fanart you may make! I've adored seeing people drawing, editing or animating our favorite duo! I'll still definitely link any art that comes into the last chapter (or elsewhere if it fits) so others can see it too as they read! Feel free to comment links to any fanart you may make for this!
>
> So? Was it worth the wait? I hope you guys have had as much fun as I have all this time! As always, comments are very greatly appreciated! It's been a long road and that's what kept me going! Thank you all for reading, interacting and commenting! I'm so glad you've all liked this fic, and hopefully the ending came out

okay! Just like usual, editing may be terrible! Thanks once again <3

End Notes

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this! Hopefully ya'll like this little fic I've been putting together! Lemme know what you think down in the comments, I'd love any feedback you're willing to give! <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!